

THE NEW MONGOLIA

THE NEW MONGOLIA D. 7

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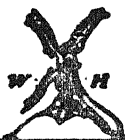
LADISLAUS FORBATH

AS RELATED BY

JOSEPH GELETA



Translated from the Hungarian by LAWRENCE WOLFE



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.

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SMUGGLERS IN THE SAYAN MOUNTAINS

A DARK night. The smugglers, most of them bearded Russian peasants, had just emerged with their transport of rifles and tobacco from the vast primeval forest of the Sayan Mountains, and were now within a short distance of the Mongolian frontier. Their objective was Urunchai, on the Mongolian plains, and the contraband included myself, an escaped prisoner of war.

The "goods" were carried in five carts drawn by heavy draught-horses—light horses would have been useless for the 150-mile journey over what was left of the Tsarist Government's pre-war attempt to cut a regular road through the forest. The spirits of the Sayan Mountains had at that time risen in revolt against the disturbers of their peace and had sent landslides and floods to destroy the man-made path in their domain as fast as it was built. Then came the war, and after that the revolution, when Cossacks and Reds seemed to vie with each other in their lust for destruction and burned all the bridges on the completed section of the road. The Cossacks and the Reds were in turn disposed of by the Saiodes, a savage Mongolian tribe who butchered everyone that crossed their path and cut the last link between Urunchai and Russia by

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stealing the wire from the telegraph line that ran along the new road. The spirits of the Sayan Mountains had won, and we were glad to have that 150 miles of bumps and jolts behind us.

We were now so close to the frontier that we could see, by the light of a camp fire, two Bolshevik guards eating their supper. The smugglers betrayed no fear. They were used to such encounters. All they did was to cover up their guns more carefully and to hug them closer, in case they were needed. . . .

The five carts rolled on—only the man who accompanied us on horseback turned tail and galloped back into the forest.

"*Stoy!*" ("Halt!") rapped out one of the frontier guards.

We obeyed. There was no search, no interrogation of the smugglers. The frontier guards were also Russian peasants and they did not seem to suspect their own kind. But they were all the more curious about me.

"Where are you going to?" asked one of them.

"To Uzinsk."

"What to do?"

"I'm an instructor, as you will see from my papers. I'm to teach the peasants of the district how to dry vegetables to the best advantage."

"Are you a *tovarich* (comrade)?"

"Of course!"

Meanwhile, the smugglers had taken the other guard aside and were telling him in excited whispers that we had been accompanied to the edge of the forest by

a Cossack officer who had escaped from Minusinsk jail, but who had ridden back into the forest at sight of the guards.

That was enough for the two young Bolsheviks. After hurriedly accepting a gift of tobacco from the smugglers they flung themselves into the saddle and raced off in pursuit of the Cossack.

Needless to say, the Cossack was also a smuggler, our "man of straw" so to speak, and this little comedy was only designed to distract the frontier guards' attention from ourselves. As soon as they disappeared in the forest we drove away as fast as we could. Another two and a half miles, and we were safely across the frontier in Mongolia.

Some fifteen miles further on we reached the camp where our associates were awaiting us. There was a friendly fire and our "Cossack officer" was already sitting in front of it sipping hot tea.

"Hullo, boys!" he greeted us. Then he told us how he had fooled the Bolshevik guards by riding for some distance along the forest track, where the hoof-prints were clearly recognisable, then fording a small river and doubling back across dry meadows to the Mongolian road ahead of us.

Our camp was in a well-hidden hollow a few hundred yards from the road, in the midst of rich pasture-land. Tying out our horses to graze, we settled down to our own meal of dried bear flesh. It was dark brown, like congealed blood, and so tough that it made our teeth grit, yet with a glass of hot tea it made a satisfying banquet in the cold night of the Mongolian steppe.

Before daybreak we harnessed our horses and set off again. We had a hard day ahead of us, for we had to be out of the frontier region as soon as possible.

The old Russian settlers who live in this part of Mongolia engage in the interesting and probably rare occupation of stag-breeding. They breed the "moral" or "vapiti" stag not so much for its meat or skin as for its antlers. At the end of June, or the beginning of July, when the antlers have grown to a fair size but are not yet fully developed, so that their pores are still full of blood, the Russian breeders saw them off the living animals, scald and desiccate the antlers and sell them in that condition to the Chinese. The usual price is from five to six dollars per pound, and the Chinese use the desiccated antlers to make a peculiar excitant. A pair of good antlers may weigh anything from twenty to thirty-two pounds, and some even tip the scales at sixty pounds, so "vapiti" stag-breeding is a fairly lucrative business. The Chinese also buy the short tail of the stag as a delicacy, paying five or six dollars per tail.

Farewell to the Smugglers

We spent two days among the stag-breeders. When we resumed our journey the sun was shining, the heat was sultry, suffocating. The steppe, wherever we went, was covered with locusts and the air was full with the rattling, zooming noise of their flight. Here and there a bustard was feasting on the living manna.

At one point we came upon a dead horse. It must have lain there for a long time, yet it was miraculously whole, with no sign of decomposition about the carcase. It was more like the mummy of a horse, the burning sun of the steppe having scorched it by day and the cruel cold frozen it by night.

The air, as everywhere in Mongolia, was as clear as crystal and one could see to incredible distances. The trail in several places cut across the dry bed of a brook, with a few puddles of water gleaming here and there in the cruel sun. In front of us, on the northern slope of a mountain, which was protected from the sun, there was a grove of red pine; the southern slope was completely barren but for the scorched remains of isolated young trees which had ventured into the cruel domain of the sun, the sun which in this region is the arbiter of life and death.

At long last we reached the Little Yenisey river—Belozarsk could not now be far away. There were a few derelict telegraph poles to indicate that we were on the right road. The sun was blazing down upon us with increasing intensity and the ash tar—the Russian's axle grease—began to drip from the axles of our carts.

Suddenly the wheels began to rattle. The spokes and wooden rims had become overheated and threatened to fall to pieces. The Little Yenisey was now far behind us and the next brook or river might be miles away, yet a breakdown could not be averted without water. We solved the problem by throwing what little drinking water we had left over the wheels,

and when that proved insufficient, tapping the source of liquid that we carried within our own bodies. There were five of us—barely enough to deal with the five carts.

Finally, after a great deal of anxious toil, we came to a flowing brook, drove the carts into the shallow water and doused the wheels with a desperate will, as though fighting a dangerous fire.

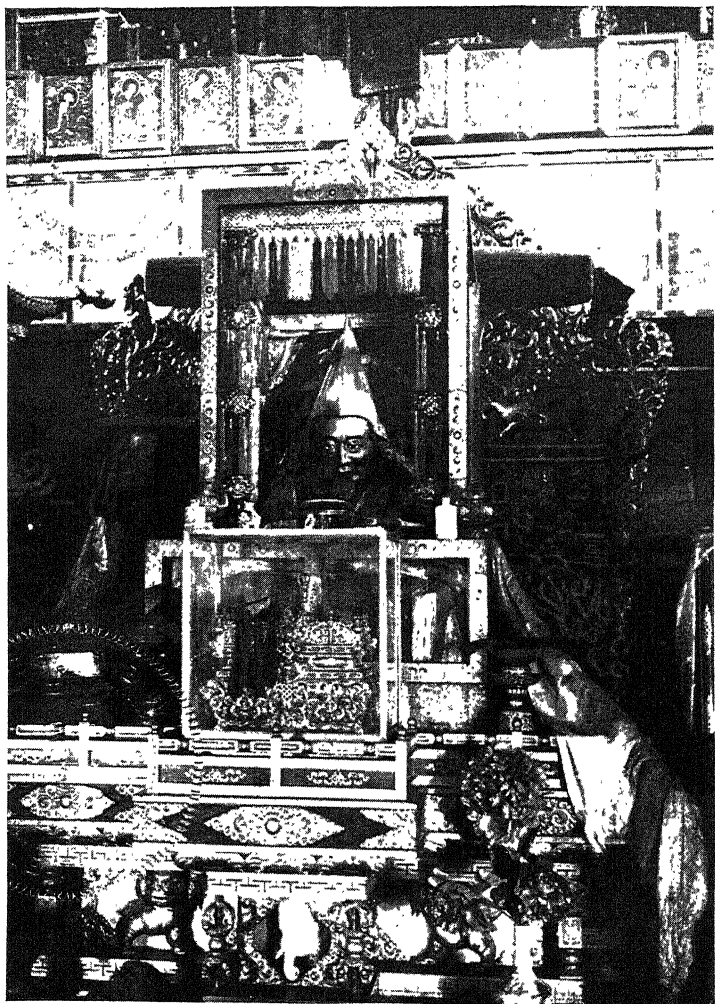
Dusk fell while we were working, so we decided to encamp for the night. The light of our fire attracted a Russian farmer who was distilling tar near-by. He sold us a barrel of the stuff and in the morning, before striking camp, we greased not only the wheels but also every other greasable portion of our carts. We resumed our journey well content with our lot.

We had ample time on the way to discuss our further plans and the question as to how and for what we could barter our wares. At that time salt was very scarce in the region of Minusinsk. The villagers paid two pounds of butter for a pound of salt in the city, although there was a salt mine near Minusinsk itself—the mine was foreign property and could not be touched. Urunchai, on the other hand, had ample supplies of salt but no tobacco, and it was said that the Urunchai people were trading salt in Belozarsk at the rate of two pounds to a pound of tobacco. But rifles were still better business. The Russian soldiers, in Russia, were selling their rifles, together with ammunition, at two or three silver roubles each, while in Belozarsk the price of a rifle was fifteen or sixteen



CEREN DORZHE

First Prime Minister of the Mongolian Republic



THE LAST BOGDO GEGEN'S GILT MUMMY IN THE TEMPLE OF
CHOIZI LAMA CHURE

dablembas (five-yard lengths of 28-in. cotton cloth), which in turn could be exchanged in Russia for three excellent draught-horses, so that, ultimately, a first-rate working horse could be obtained for two or three silver roubles.

Another lucrative commodity was tea, on which the profits were even greater, though the disposal of smuggled tea was correspondingly more difficult, since it could only be sold in the towns, where revenue control was stricter than in the villages.

Our discussion of these matters and of our prospective profits was suddenly interrupted by a glad cry from one of the smugglers:

"That's Belozarsk!"

We were on the bank of a river—the Great Yenissey—and the smugglers were excitedly pointing towards the opposite bank. I could see no sign of a town, however hard I looked, but the others seemed quite certain.

"*Ab vot . . . vot*" ("There, there" . . .) they insisted.

There was nothing left of Belozarsk. The Saiodes had set fire to the town and had afterwards taken away what the flames did not consume.

In the early afternoon a Russian with a bushy red beard came across to us from the opposite bank. He was the ferryman, though the ferry had long disappeared, and all he had to carry passengers and goods in was a large rowing boat.

We hurriedly agreed with him to take two of the

smugglers to the other side of the river, in order to enable them to "spy out the land." We stood watching the boat as it fought its way across, with the ferryman rowing in an extremity of effort against the swift current of the Great Yenissey, which is at this point—the confluence of the two branches of the river—several hundred yards wide.

By the evening my fellow-smugglers were back again, having already concluded the deal with some Russian traders, bartering the tobacco for salt and the rifles and ammunition for *dablembas*. One of the two smugglers had also made arrangements on my behalf with a Russian trader, who undertook to send me on to the first Mongolian outpost, which was encamped some distance to the south of our resting place.

So in the morning I, together with the goods, was to be ferried across to the other side of the river. My plan was succeeding! During the intervening hours I attended to the final arrangements in connection with the long journey that lay ahead of me. I counted my money, made out an account, then wrote two letters, both addressed to Minusinsk, where, as a Hungarian prisoner of war, I had been employed at the power works. The first letter:

"MY DEAR CHIEF ENGINEER,—

"As I told you beforehand, I am doing a bunk. To-night I am on the right bank of the Yenissey, to-morrow I shall be on the left bank, in four or five days at the Mongolian outpost, and then—*au revoir*

at home in Hungary. You can have my compass and things, as I left them. I enclose a statement of account for the company. I was entitled to travel at their expense as far as the Russian frontier and have done so. I am returning the balance of the money to the last kopek. Good-bye!

“GELETA.”

The second letter:

“The Directors,

“Power Works,

“Minusinsk.

“I am sending you herewith a statement of account, together with the balance of the advance received from you. Of this I have spent my monthly allowance and my travelling expenses to the Russian frontier. I am returning the whole of the balance; please receipt to the Chief Engineer. I am greatly obliged for the kindness you have shown me, but I am afraid I cannot continue to enjoy it. After three years of captivity I long to get home, and as I now have an opportunity to do so I do not wish to miss it.

“GELETA.”

After writing the letters I put my few possessions in order—a razor, a clasp knife, a pair of leather breeches, some top boots, a short fur coat, some underwear, and a few sheets of paper. The rest I presented to the leader of the band of smugglers, who had helped me to escape, and who was also taking back with him the letters and the company’s money. I

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paid him the agreed sum for smuggling me out of Russia, and a bit over, and was rewarded by an almost too vigorous handshake from a pleased and grateful man.

In the morning we rowed across the river, where the Russian trader who was to be my mentor was already awaiting me.

I had written "Au revoir at home," intending to make straight for my native country via Mongolia and China.

Yet I paused on the way—for nine years, from the spring of 1920 until the summer of 1929. I found that it was a long, long way from the Great Yenissey to the Danube.

II

AT THE MONGOLIAN OUTPOST

ON the opposite bank of the river there was nothing but blackened ruins rising from the hot sand, with blocks of masonry lying scattered all round and, here and there, a few blades of scorched grass. Belozarsk, but recently a prosperous Cossack garrison city, was no more. Its former site was almost deserted, except for a mere handful of the city's former inhabitants, who had grimly hung on and were eking out a miserable existence in underground hovels.

Immediately upon landing I met Beziatikov, the young Russian trader in whose hands lay my future destiny. He had once been a well-to-do Cossack, owning a house and some land in Belozarsk, and working in partnership with his elder brother. Then the latter was killed by the Saiodes, who also fired the younger man's house—after removing the tin-plate roof—so Beziatikov literally dug himself in with his sister-in-law and her children and resumed his trading. The housework was attended to by his adopted family, while the young trader himself acted as middleman between the Russian smugglers and the Chinese in their barter transactions. Thus it was really through Beziatikov that the greater part of Mongolia was supplied with smuggled goods.

Beziazikov conducted me to his home, which to me looked very much like a dug-out at the war front. We were evidently expected, for as we entered we were greeted by the friendly babble of the samovar, which stood ready on the table. We ate good white wheaten bread thickly spread with cream and drank tea in big gulps, and over this meal we discussed sundry plans to get me to the Mongolian outpost.

Finally, my host asked me for my note-book.

"I'll write you a note of introduction," he said, "to someone in Uliasutai. There's a man living there who owes me some money. I can't visit him myself just now. He'll give you a bit of cash—it'll come in handy on the journey. And when you get home to Hungary, or if we should happen to meet again, you'll pay me back."

I was surprised and touched. So this, I thought, was what my "enemy" in the late war was really like. And here, too, amidst the ruins of his native city!

"Also," Beziazikov went on, "my sister-in-law will go with you if you care to stay till the morning. We too have some business at the Mongolian field headquarters. The Said is there now. We want some pasture land and the Saiodes when we asked them for it said that none but he could grant it to us. I can't go myself, for I have to look after my stock."

We packed some provisions for the journey and in the morning Mme. Beziazikov and I set out in a cart. We soon left the steppe behind and were able to discern in the distance the mountains and forests of the Tannu-ola. The Mongolian outpost, the goal of

our journey, lay behind one of the peaks that rose ahead of us.

From the top of a hill, which we reached many, many hours after we first saw it, we could already see the Mongolian camp—a group of white tents in a green field—at the foot of the Tannu-ola.

These Mongolian tents are rather interesting. There are in the whole of Mongolia but few solid—i.e. wooden or stone—buildings, and even these are for the most part temples or lama monasteries. The vast majority of the population, who are cattle-breeding nomads, live in tents, though not in what we in Europe know by that name. The Mongolian variety is a solid, house-like structure, yet at the owner's pleasure it can easily be taken to pieces, carted away to any desired place, and rapidly re-erected.

This type of tent is necessary to the Mongolian nomads, for they move about with their herds a great deal, spending the summer in the plains and the winter close to the forest—their winter pasture—and they must have an easily portable shelter which will nevertheless defy the storms of the Mongolian steppe and at the same time protect the inmates from the scorching heat of summer as well as from the biting frosts of the cold season.

The Mongolian tent—or *gherte*, as the natives call it—is built as follows. First a cylindrical skeleton is constructed from wooden laths which are fastened together with leather thongs, not nailed. This

skeleton is topped with a similarly constructed truncated conical roof frame. The whole is then covered over with a peculiar type of felt, the production of which is a local speciality.

The process begins by spreading out on the ground a set of large hides and covering them with a thick layer of sheep's wool. The wool is sprinkled with water and covered over with another set of hides. The two sets of hides, with the interlarded wool, are then rolled up, somewhat like a pancake, and this "pancake" is tightly bandaged round with a long leather strap. The loose end of the strap is fastened to the saddle of a horse, which is ridden at a gallop round the steppe, dragging the hides behind it on the ground. The layer of wet wool compressed between the hides is in this way bounced and battered into felt. When the rider is satisfied that the wool has become sufficiently soft and consistent, the hides are undone and the felt is spread out to dry. The felt is subsequently cut up into squares and attached to the tent frame by means of thin hair cords. The circular aperture at the top of the conical roof is left open, in order to allow the smoke of the fireplace—the *tagan*—to escape, but even this can be closed by means of a felt flap attached to the edge of the aperture, and operated by throwing a long cord depending from it from one side of the tent to the other.

All Mongolian tents are alike outside, and practically so inside. The centre of the tent is occupied by a low stone pillar, the *tagan*. In the rear, opposite the entrance, stands the domestic shrine with statuettes

of various gods, and this is flanked on each side by a sort of wardrobe chest. There are two large beds, one on the right for the owner and his wife, and another on the left for their children and guests. The harness hangs to the left of the entrance, between it and the children's bed, while the cooking utensils are kept on a shelf to the right of the entrance.

The entrance of the tent always faces south. This situation, besides affording protection from the north wind, also serves another purpose—it enables the owner to use his tent as a sundial. The sunshine streaming in through the roof aperture throws a circle of light on the floor of the tent, and this circle during the day travels along the walls right round the tent. In the morning the disc of light is in the left-hand part of the tent, since the sun always rises to the right of it. By midday it reaches the shrine opposite the entrance, while during the afternoon it moves towards the bed on the right. That is why the Mongolian when he wishes to indicate three or four o'clock in the afternoon, says, "When the sun reaches my bed."

It was of tents like this that the Mongolian field headquarters consisted. When we arrived the smoke was gaily curling forth from the tent tops and the "streets" were thronged with a surging crowd of warriors. When they saw us coming down the hill several of them flung themselves into the saddle and, holding their rifles high above their heads, charged down upon us.

"*Hanas?*" ("Where from?")

"From Belozarsk," I replied. "We want to see the Said."

"*Yav!*" ("Come along!") snapped one of the soldiers.

Our cart rolled slowly down the hill. We could already discern the features of the soldiers walking about among the tents.

The Said's two tents stood out from the rest of the camp and were visible from afar. One of them was his own residence, while the other contained his office and also accommodated his adjutant.

We were taken to the orderly officer's tent, where we asked to see the Said, stating our business with him. One of the Mongolian soldiers thereupon hurriedly left the tent, presumably to convey our request to the Said, and a few minutes later we were taken to the large white tent which was his office.

We found the Said—Chatom-Bator-Van, or Count Chatom the Brave, who subsequently became Minister of War—sitting opposite the entrance on a gorgeous, many-hued carpet cushion. He was a smooth-faced, friendly-looking old Mongolian, dressed in a robe of heavy red silk with a wide blue silk sash round the waist, with the silver-wrought hilt of a dagger sticking out of the sash, and the usual flint-and-steel fire-lighter depending from it on a thin chain. In front of the Said, on a low, red-wood table, lay the wooden official seal and a few documents written in Mongolian.

After respectfully saluting the Said we stood silent, for we had been instructed beforehand that according

to Mongolian etiquette a suppliant must not state his request until he is called upon to do so. The old gentleman for awhile looked at us with his intelligent dark brown eyes, scanning our faces and looking us up and down. Then:

"What do you want?" he snapped at Mme. Beziazikov.

"I want some pasture land, my lord," replied the woman humbly. Then she briefly explained that she had already applied to the Saiodes but that the latter had referred her to him. The Said without a moment's consideration flung his decision at her:

"Chetechku!" ("Can't be done!")

The poor woman pleaded with him, but it was all in vain. The Said was adamant, and when she realised that she could not move him she burst into tears and left the tent.

The Said's eyes now flashed upon me.

"And you—what do you want?"

"A passport for Urga."

"Where do you come from?"

I told him I had been a prisoner of war in Russia and had escaped. But the old man was not satisfied. He wanted to know why I had chosen to return to my native land by way of Mongolia. I explained my proposed route.

"Chetechku!" came the stereotyped reply.

My legs began to tremble. This meant that after all the dangers and hardships I had gone through I was to be prevented from continuing my journey and perhaps even forced to return to Russia. I began to

plead with the old man, explaining that what I wanted was not permission to stay in Mongolia but merely the right to pass through the country, as quickly as possible, to the Chinese frontier. The Said listened impassively, then:

“Go back where you came from,” he said quietly. “We want no Bolsheviks here.”

“But I am not a Bolshevik,” I cried. “I am not even Russian.”

“*Be yachne mitne?*” (“How can I tell?”) returned the old man with a shrug.

I knew then that it was all up with me. I staggered out of the tent, dazed with despair.

As I came out into the open I was surrounded by a curious crowd of soldiers. One half-naked Mongolian, after benevolently eyeing me for a while, invited me into his tent.

III

MONGOLIAN ETIQUETTE

PICKING up my rucksack from the ground I followed him. He waved me to a cushion, then he offered me his tobacco pouch, which is the most emphatic expression of friendliness with Mongolians. We lighted our long-stemmed, small pipes with the aid of the Mongolian's fire-lighter set, which he carried in his belt. The set consisted of a small leather bag with a strip of steel fitted to its crescent-shaped base, a piece of flint and some dried white heather, which my host used as tinder.

After the first few puffs the Mongolian asked me about myself. With the idea of gaining his confidence, I began to praise his fire-lighter set and expressed my surprise that he should use such a rare plant as white heather for tinder. The Mongolian smilingly observed that there were many hilly places in the country where every inch of the ground was covered with this "rare plant." Then:

"Now tell me about yourself," he said again, not without curiosity in his voice.

I told him my story, explaining that the reason I had sought temporary refuge in his country was that, being a Magyar, I regarded the Mongolians as my brothers. He listened to my recital very intently (the

conversation was carried on in Russian which my host, like many of his compatriots, spoke quite well), and when I came to my interview with the Said he laughed.

"No wonder you couldn't get a passport to-day," he said. "No, not to-day."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Didn't you see the two Russians in front of the Said's tent? They too came from Russia and want to go to Uliasutai, but the Said won't have them in the country and so, of course, he can't make an exception with you."

Then, after a moment's reflection, he suddenly turned to me again:

"I say, did you give the Said a *chadak*?"

I had no idea what a *chadak* was and my face must have betrayed my ignorance, for the Mongolian, instead of explaining, fetched from another part of the tent a piece of blue silk—about twenty inches long and ten wide—and spread it out before me.

"This is it," he said. "When you call on a man you must bring him a *chadak* without fail. That's the custom in this country."

"But I haven't got a *chadak*," I said, "and I don't know how to get one."

"What have you got in that sack?" he asked. With that he picked up my rucksack and emptied its contents on the floor. My shirts and other underwear he threw aside with complete indifference, but he was keenly interested in the nickel case that held my shaving stick, and still more so in my razor, the use of which

he did not seem to understand.

I must explain here that although the vast majority of Mongolians wear no beards, they do not shave in the ordinary sense of the term. Instead, they pluck out the hair one by one with a small pair of tweezers, which appears to be the constant companion of every male Mongolian. When they have nothing else to do, and sometimes even during conversation, they absently stroke their faces in search of new hairs and pluck them out with the tweezers as they appear. They do have their heads shaved, particularly in the towns, but this operation is performed by Chinese barbers, who use no soap and merely wet the victim's hair with warm water. In addition, their razor is quite different from ours, being not more than two inches long and having a three- or four-inch bulge on the blunt side of the blade. The European razor and the European method of shaving are almost unknown in Mongolia, that was why my friend was so struck with my razor.

"Well," he said at length, "if you have no *chadak* let the Said have this—he'll give you something in return, you may be sure. When the Russians are gone he's sure to give you a pass to go to Urga."

Then he resumed his search among my belongings, which were now lying in an untidy heap on the floor. He seemed to take a violent fancy to a halter I had, and after turning it this way and that, he finally asked me whether he might have it.

This was rather embarrassing, for the halter was a piece of genuine old Mongolian work with extra-

ordinarily fine and beautifully wrought brass studs, and I had intended to take it home to Hungary.

"Do let me have it," said the Mongolian again, "I'll give you another for it."

He brought his own, which was perhaps even more beautiful than mine. I was puzzled as to why he should want to effect the exchange, and it occurred to me that it might be merely because my halter was something different from his own. But the Mongolian mistook my puzzlement for hesitation.

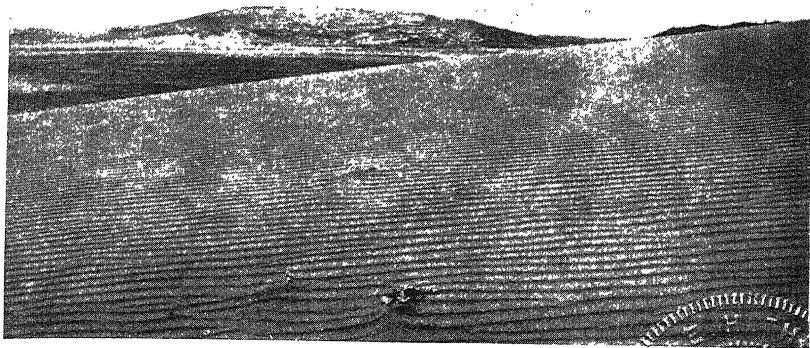
"If you'll let me have it I'll help you with the Said," he said. "I'll tell him that you're not a Russian, that you're a good man. . . ."

I agreed, and we sealed our friendship with a cup of tea and another pipe. Meanwhile, several other soldiers had entered the tent and my friend excitedly began to tell them something in Mongolian. The company soon broke up and a few minutes later the whole camp knew that I was a "Manchar," European but not Russian, and a member of a sister race which had migrated centuries ago in search of a new home.

Shortly after my friend's tent was invaded by a curious crowd of half-naked soldiers with greasy skins who to me looked pretty much alike. Then another man slipped in and shouted to me over the heads of the crowd:

"The Russians are gone."

My friend now hurriedly explained how I must behave in the Said's presence in order to find favour with him. It was then that I received my first lesson in Mongolian etiquette. The correct procedure,



THE GOBI DESERT



SUMMER MORNING, WITH TRACES OF NIGHT'S FROST



MONGOLIAN HUSBAND AND WIFE

as far as I could gather from my friend's recital, was as follows:

The suppliant upon entering the great man's tent says, with a deep bow:

"Se-in amorchan—se-in be-ina!" ("Good day, with respect, good day.")

He must not go further than the entrance of the tent, unless and until the Said indicates a point on the floor and says *"Co!"* ("Sit down.") The visitor must then kneel down on his right knee, turn his foot inwards and sit on his heel. To sit on the floor or take up any other position than the one described, would be regarded as a grave breach of good manners. After this, explained my professor of deportment, I must wait until the Said speaks to me, when I must rise, hand over my gift with a low bow, then resume my former position without uttering a word.

After the lesson I was once more announced to the Said. As I entered his tent the old gentleman was bending over the low red-wood table, writing. I saluted him in the correct manner and was immediately told to sit down. I sat down as instructed, suppressing a groan as the weight of my body descended on my twisted foot.

"Still here?" asked the Said with a frown.

With considerable difficulty I rose to my feet and performing my bow with extreme care, handed over my present. The razor seemed to please him. He examined it with interest, opening it and turning it round in his hand several times.

"What do you use it for?" he then inquired.

I explained.

"Well," he observed doubtfully, "if the thing can really do what you say I'll accept it. But first you must prove that you are speaking the truth."

Turning to my Mongolian friend, who was watching the proceedings from the entrance, he said:

"Call my adjutant."

When the adjutant arrived the old warrior told him in a few words that sounded like the crack of a whip, to sit down and be shaved. The adjutant made a wry face; he seemed to have little faith either in me or in my instrument.

"Get on with it!" snapped the Said, handing me the razor.

I lathered the young man's face, an operation that seemed to frighten him, then stropped the razor and began to shave him. Those present in the tent watched my movements with widened eyes, a sign of great wonderment with the almond-eyed Mongolians. When my work was finished I held my pocket-mirror in front of the adjutant.

"All right, all right," he said, beaming at his reflection with immense satisfaction.

That took a load off my mind; to have failed with that shave would have been catastrophic for me.

The Said immediately sent for his steward, who approached him bowing and scraping.

"Give this man ten *gins* [a *gin* is about a pound and a half] of flour," he ordered.

Then he turned to me.

"All right, I believe you. I believe you that you

aren't a Bolshevik, and I'll take you with me. I'm leaving for Kobdo in six or seven days—you may come with me as far as that. From Kobdo I'll send you on. And this gift—take it, it's kindly meant.”

I thanked him with an outburst of joy, but asked whether I might not rather be sent to Uliasutai, whence I intended to go to Urga—Kobdo was too far, some four hundred miles from Uliasutai.

The old gentleman regarded me with a benevolent smile.

“All right, then. Stay here until nightfall, when the commander of the first *urton* arrives. He'll take you along to the *urton* and from there he'll send you to Uliasutai. Your permit will follow to-morrow.”

I nearly jumped out of my skin for joy. I had not only got my permit but was also to be assisted by the *urton*, that splendid Mongolian institution which was a passenger transport line and catering concern in one, and about which I had already heard at the Russian frontier.

IV

BEWARE OF STRANGERS. . . .

WHILE sipping my tea, served within an instant of the Said's order, I took a good look at the interior of the tent. There were gorgeous carpets everywhere. The *tagan* (fireplace) in the centre was a low, square pillar of bricks built into a wooden frame, with a heap of charcoal glowing in a convex grate on top of the pillar. The tea urn that was now singing a merry song on the fire was an experience in itself. It was profusely decorated with delicately wrought bas-reliefs of fantastic scenes and figures, such as a stag being hunted by Mongolians mounted on horses whose nostrils belched smoke and fire, with hundreds of arrows flying after the stag. This scene alone, traced with exquisite, almost appalling, detail, must have taken a master hand years to complete.

The walls of the tent were lined with red-and-yellow silk fabrics, brilliantly reflecting the sunshine that streamed in through the aperture at the top of the tent.

To the right of the entrance stood a red lacquer cabinet full of beautiful vessels of all kinds. A rack to the left of the entrance was laden with saddles emblazoned with wrought silver and padded with red Tibetan carpets. The stirrups were in black-burnished

carved steel, with silver *intarzia* gleaming forth from the blackness—characteristic Mongolian work.

The domestic shrine was even more interesting. There was the image of a Chinese dragon with an enormous head guarding the domestic gods and, behind it, a glass cabinet containing a statuette of the serene Buddha side by side with another of Djinghi, with his repulsive, voluptuously distorted face, holding in front of him his tiny wife, her head thrown back, facing the god with erotic exaltation engraved in her features.

In front of the gods were ranged a number of small sacrificial cups in red copper, and sacrificial bowls made of the silver-plated tops of human skulls and mounted on three silver legs. These *gabalas* were filled with offerings of meat, tea, flour and fat.

The chalices would have been an ornament to any collection of *objets d'art*, not only as exquisite examples of the metal-worker's art but also on account of the special alloy of which they were made. The secret of this alloy is jealously guarded by the Tibetan and Mongolian lamas who make it, and all that is known is that besides bronze and copper it also contains some gold and silver. These cups possess the peculiar property that when lightly struck they give a ringing, musical tone which persists for many minutes afterwards.

Besides the chalices there were two cylindrical pieces of wood bearing the inscription "OM MANI PADME HUM" (There is Treasure in the Lotus), a mystic phrase. These sticks are "prayer machines," which the

faithful twirl between their fingers while thinking, talking or smoking, in lieu of reciting their prayers. More ingenious still—there are water-mills in Tibet and Mongolia with “prayer machines” fitted to their wheels, so that the owners are prayed for day and night all the year round without the trouble of even twirling the inscribed sticks.

In front of the shrine burned a greyish-violet candle, filling the tent with a pleasant smell, somewhat like that of incense.

The shrine was hung with silk *chadaks*, and pieces of silk embroidered with prayers and sacred images.

I saw a similar shrine in every Mongolian tent or house that I entered during my subsequent long stay in the country, and in the course of my investigations into the matter I learned that Mongolian national life for centuries has been little more than an appendage of their religious faith. Till the end of the sixteenth century they were Shamanites, like nearly all the other Central Asiatic peoples, worshipping Nature, at once their best friend and most powerful enemy, whose mysteries they could never fathom, and against whose awesome might even their ever-victorious armies were as helpless as babes. They feared the forces of Nature, embodied its mysteries in religious symbols and sought protection from its spirits in the use of magic.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century Buddhism, or rather one of its almost purely ritualistic

forms, lamaism, became the official religion of Northern Mongolia. The change represented a great gain to the Mongolian people, for the philosophical nature of Buddhism made them more thoughtful, taught them to love their fellow-men and inculcated in them the idea of the brotherhood of man. However, in the last analysis Buddhism also gradually undermined the then foundations of Mongolia by blunting the warlike spirit of the nation and quenching its insane desire for more and more victories.

One half of the once warlike Mongolian people changed into an indolent, unambitious proletariat living in abject poverty, while the other half retired behind the walls of the lama monasteries—the *chure-s*—and became completely detached from the life and aspirations of the people. To-day, although the simple nomads are deeply under the influence of the lamas' prayers—muttered in the Tibetan dialect—and their brilliant religious ceremonies, all this is for the most part external, a colourful pretence, and does not prevent the common people from cherishing the memory of the great Djenghis Khan.

But both their religion and their historical experience bid the Mongolians to *beware of strangers*. They have many bitter memories to justify this national motto, and if, even to-day, they make it difficult for a foreigner to enter their country, it is because the easy-going, dreamy descendants of a once invincible race are afraid of again falling under a foreign yoke.

THE URTON

AFTER tea I was asked a few more questions, as an official formality, and was then allowed to leave the Said's presence together with my Mongolian friend.

He led me to an open space where the soldiers' dinner—a whole cow—was cooking in a vast copper. The bladders of the animal, which had been calmly grazing shortly before, were already hanging up on a tree to dry. These bladders are a very valuable article in the steppe and are used to store fat, butter and cheese. The hide had been thrown into a nearby brook, with a large stone rolled over it. I asked my friend why this was done, and he explained with evident pleasure.

It appears that the raw hide is left submerged in the water for from six to eight days, by which time the hair and the thin upper skin become so softened that they can easily be drawn off together. The hide proper is then cut up with wooden knives into straps, which in turn are for a time kneaded, rubbed and twisted together, dipped in milk or some other greasy fluid, then rubbed together again. By way of relief the strips of leather are sometimes wrapped up in wet rags and left to soak until it is desired to

resume the work. The treatment is continued until the straps are perfectly soft, when they are worked into harness, etc.

He gave me his belt to handle; it was extremely soft and malleable, yet at the same time almost indestructible.

"A properly finished Mongolian strap," concluded my friend proudly, "never tears or breaks; even water doesn't damage it."

It had now become quite dark and the night watch on their small horses were lining up. The soldiers were armed with excellent Russian carbines and Cossack swords, and had the upper part of their bodies completely covered with ammunition belts. The officer of the watch had a German Mauser rifle. These modern weapons contrasted strangely with the dress and appearance of the Mongolians—their black pigtails, long blue coats, low top-boots with curling points and vari-coloured saddles. The equipment of these sixteen warriors was symptomatic of the whole tendency of modern Mongolia, where the externals of progress are gradually taking their place beside the customs and fantastic traditions of the past.

We sat down to dinner—or supper—in the open. The soldiers spread out on the ground a large hide and proceeded to cover it with chunks of steaming meat from the copper. We sat down in a circle round the hide and helped ourselves with our hands. At first I was somewhat embarrassed, as, of course, I was as yet unfamiliar with the do's and don't's of

Mongolian table manners. But I had no difficulty in learning them. Each of my companions held a chunk of meat in his left hand and a knife in his right, and after getting his teeth firmly into the meat slashed off a mouthful and ate it with many loud grunts. In this way they consumed two or three pounds of meat each, without bread or salt, only taking a sip of the "soup," which was served in tea-cups, every now and then.

Suddenly there was the sound of horses' hooves, and two riders came galloping towards us.

"*Urton, urton!*" shouted the Mongolians.

The means of communication are still practically the same in Mongolia as they were in the time of Djenghis Khan. The *urton*, which is both a passenger and postal service, was originally organised by the founder of Greater Mongolia. The organisation consists of stations established at intervals of twenty to twenty-five miles, each station disposing of a number of horses and camels. Anyone receiving from the competent authority—at present a department of the Home Office—a *zara* or permit, is entitled to claim from the nearest *urton* the number of horses or camels mentioned in the permit, either immediately or at any future date fixed by him. However, the holder of a *zara* must provide for the journey his own saddle or carriage, it being assumed that everyone prefers his own saddle or carriage. The *urton* also provides the traveller with an escort, who accompanies him to the next station. The *urton* horses cover the intervening distance—from twenty to twenty-five

miles—at a gallop, a feat which few European horses are capable of performing.

Arrived at the second station, the horses are exchanged and while this is done the traveller is entertained by the station commander to tea. Within five minutes or so the traveller and his new escort are in the saddle again. In order to prevent injury to the internal organs through the furious riding, the Mongolians wear a wide belt tightly drawn over their stomachs. Thus equipped they are able to gallop a hundred miles at a stretch.

There is an even faster *urton* service than this, but this is run exclusively by first-class horsemen who are distinguished by a special badge and an eagle's feather in their caps. These *urton* horsemen sometimes cover a thousand miles in not more than four days. During such rides they take no solid food between sunrise and sunset, and only take tea at the stations where they halt. This rule is religiously observed throughout the service and the *urton* riders are therefore all the more generously entertained at the station where they spend the night.

The stations, including the animals, belong to private individuals, the majority of whom have entered the service because it carries relief from military service and taxation.

The Mongolian Government in recent years has set a strict limit to the number of *zaras* issued, but the travel position has been eased to some extent by the appearance of the motor-car on the Mongolian steppe and in the Gobi Desert.

Where there is no regular *urton* service the inhabitants themselves must transport—and also feed—the traveller from one stage of his journey to the other. This unofficial service is called *urga*—like the capital of Mongolia.

VI

EXORCISM

THE *urton* riders turned out their horses to graze, then took a leather bag containing the mail to the orderly tent. Shortly afterwards they joined us at our meal, sitting down on their in-turned feet and telling the company the news from the places they had visited.

Then the adjutant brought out the outgoing mail and conveyed to them the Said's instructions.

"You will take this man to your station," he said, "then you'll send him on. The *bichik* (permit) will follow to-morrow. The Said said you must treat this stranger well."

In the morning I bade a grateful farewell to my Mongolian friend, without whose intervention I might not have been able to continue my journey, and who had also acted as my interpreter when necessary, for at that time I knew no Mongolian; then we—the two *urton* riders and I—galloped out of the camp.

The first station was in the Djarglantuï Valley, not far from the outpost, yet by the time we reached it I was fairly worn out, for the mount I had been given was a somewhat bony animal and, having no saddle of my own, I had had to ride it bareback.

However, I soon forgot my physical troubles, for there was considerable excitement and a great deal of running about at the station, and I concluded that there was something afoot that was worth watching. The two riders who had accompanied me explained what it was. It appeared that there was a young Mongolian lying ill in one of the tents who, having been treated by the lama doctors with every conceivable herb without success, was thought to be possessed by an evil spirit. The sick man's relations had now brought along a Shamanite lama—the last resort in such cases—to exorcise the evil spirit, for though the Mongolians as a whole are Buddhists, in their heart of hearts they still believe in Shamanism, their old religion.

A few minutes after my arrival at the station the horrible, nerve-racking ceremony began.

I must explain here that Shamanite lamas are so called only because they are qualified to perform the ceremonial of the Shamanite faith. Otherwise they are good Buddhists, and theoretically opposed to Shamanism, though liberal-minded enough to practise Shamanism themselves rather than allow a separate Shamanite priesthood to develop among the people.

The lama who officiated in this instance had originally been called in in his capacity as a doctor, but, apparently, he came prepared for the worst, and in addition to his "scientific" paraphernalia—knives, tweezers and bags of herbs which depended from his belt—he had also brought with him his Shamanite dress and equipment.

The ceremonial dress consisted of a gown made of black leather and a bushy cap of animal hair that covered both his head and his face and was decorated with coloured feathers. At his sides hung bunches of leather straps with many bells and pieces of metal fastened to them. In his left hand he held a vast drum, and in his right a drum-stick sheathed in leather.

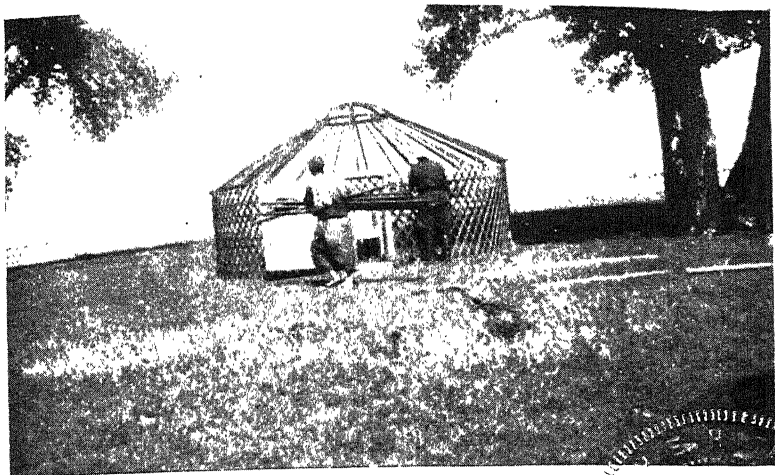
The sick man was carried out of the tent by the Shamanite's assistants—two young lamas—who then pinned blue, yellow and red silk ribbons all over their master's gown. The Shamanite now sat down on a stool in the centre of the tent, while his assistants stood on his right and left, with sundry musical instruments, drums and bells in their hands, and also in front of them on the floor. The tent had meanwhile filled with sympathisers and a few others who, like myself, came out of mere curiosity. One of the assistants turned to the assembled company and inquired whether anyone had tobacco on him and proceeded to relieve us of every strand of the weed, explaining that there must be no tobacco in the tent during the ceremony. Having taken the tobacco outside the tent the assistant returned and stuck a huge Mongolian sword into the ground close to the Shamanite.

Then the ceremony began.

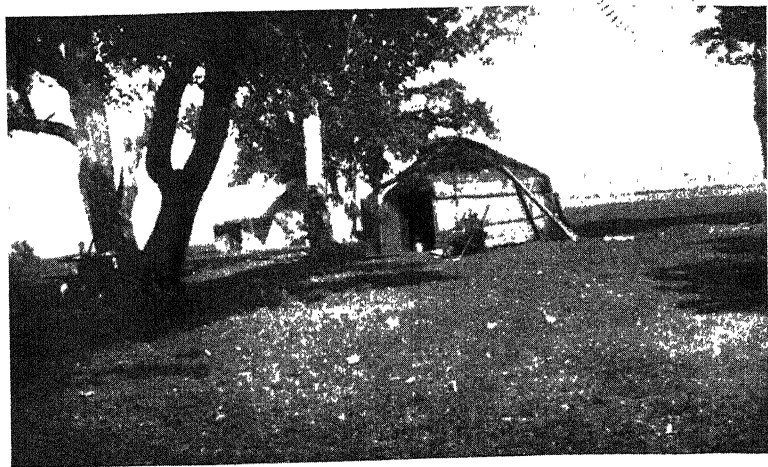
The music started with a mighty crash, the roar of the drums mingling with the shrill clamour of bells and the clang of metal upon metal. The Shamanite at first sat sunk within himself, reciting something in a whisper. Then gradually he drew himself up, his

voice rising higher and higher, and as it climbed to a wild scream the music became fainter and fainter, except for the intermittent thunder of the drums. After a while the priest rose to his feet, rolling his bloodshot eyes and flinging his arms wildly about, the din of the music simultaneously rising to an ear-splitting crescendo. The spectators recoiled in terror from the gesticulating figure and pressed close to the wall of the tent. The priest was now foaming at the mouth. Suddenly he gave a nerve-shattering scream, as suddenly the music stopped and for a few moments there was dead silence, a silence charged with breathless, petrified fear. The priest writhed, shook himself, threw his drum away, then leaping into the air he landed in front of the sword and plucked it out of the ground. A burst of music, rolling drums, screaming bells, then silence.

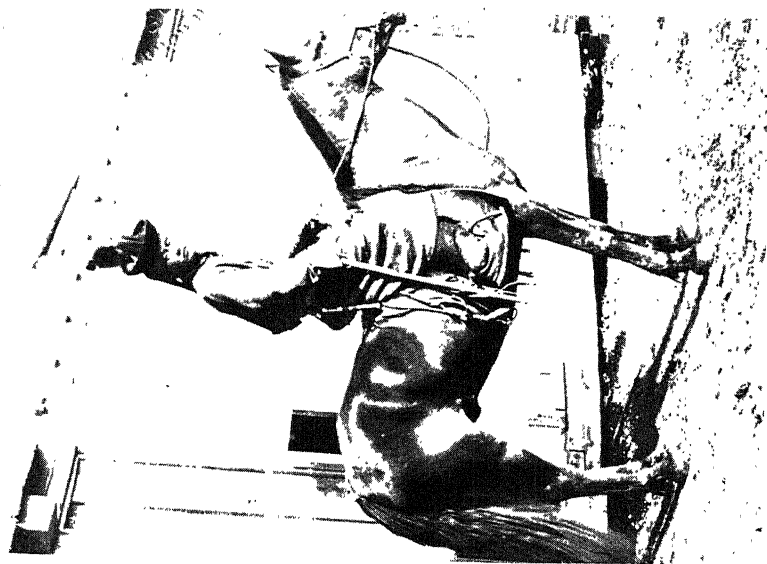
The Shamanite with lightning speed whirled the long, curved sword high above his head, cutting through the air with a high-pitched, whistling swish. Then he began to spin round and round, the glinting circle made by the blade in the air descended lower and lower, till the point of the sword was close to our faces, so close that we all whimpered with fear. In an insane, screaming frenzy the priest continued to dance about, stabbing every inch of the air with the murderous, flashing blade, lest the evil spirit find a refuge in any space, however small. He neither saw nor heard, only hopped about with closed eyes, shrieking and foaming at the mouth, thrusting, lunging and parrying, yet his sword flew past within



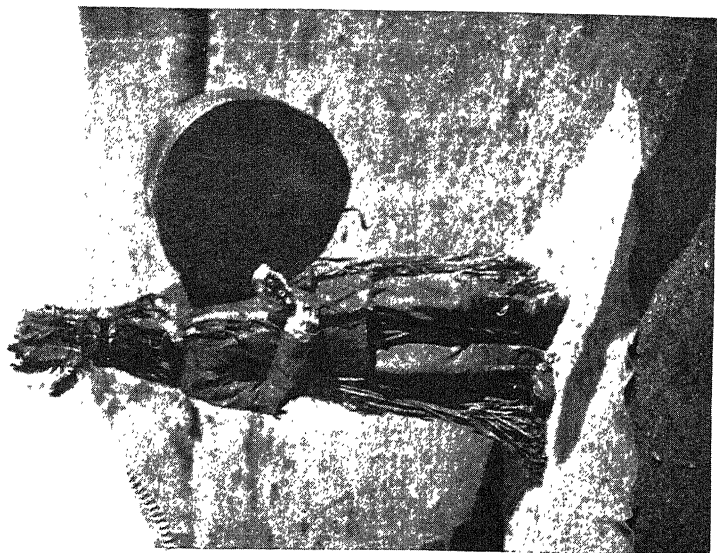
MONGOLIAN TENT IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION



COMPLETED TENT



URTON RIDER



LAMA "DOCTOR" AT WORK

a hair's breadth of our faces and bodies without inflicting so much as a scratch.

Suddenly the Shamanite bounded out of the tent and ran round it at a terrific pace, incessantly swinging his sword in the air, and chasing the evil spirit in ever-wider circles and with ever-increasing fury. He is already out in the field and frightened birds rise at his approach. Now he stops dead, as though petrified, and crashes headlong to the ground. He rolls over on his back, his chest rising and falling, his arms spread out. The two lamas dash up to him, fan him with their kerchiefs and douse his face with cold water until he comes to himself. The Shamanite sits up, looks dazedly round, then assisted by the other two he rises to his feet, and leaning on their shoulders staggers into one of the tents. His disciples then laid him on a bed to rest, while the commandant of the station "passed the hat round" for the Shaman, for, of course, even the devil refuses to depart for nothing. The collection consisted of a few coins, several lengths of silk, some flour and other provisions.

Whether the sick Mongolian subsequently recovered, I cannot say. Certain it is that the lama's horrible performance nearly made me ill, though ordinarily my nerves are extraordinarily strong.

VII

I GET MY MONGOLIAN PASSPORT

WHILST the Shaman was struggling with the evil spirits, supper was cooking in the square between the tents of the *urton*. The boiled beef was just as excellent and we consumed it with the same hearty appetite as the previous day at field headquarters. After supper I was taken to a tent and introduced to my host, the commandant of the station, who immediately began the "ceremony of friendship." He brought out the "pipe of friendship," a long-stemmed affair carved in brass, filled its tiny bowl with a pinch of tobacco, lit it, took a long whiff, then handed the pipe to me. I also took a long whiff, and that was the end both of the tobacco and the ceremony.

After this my host and his wife began to prepare for bed, calmly undressing before me as though I were not there. Being too modest myself to watch them, I turned my back on them and only sat down on the bed to undress when I thought they were already in bed. As I lay in bed there was now and then a flicker of flame from the *tagan*, and the idols in the domestic shrine were illuminated by a ghostly light. Through the circular aperture at the top of the tent I could see a piece of the dark sky studded with twinkling stars.

* * * *

The next morning I received my "*bichik*," or passport, the horses were saddled, and I was escorted to the next *urton* by the commander himself. A few hours' hard riding and we were there. My Mongolian recommended me to his colleague at this second *urton*, and after drinking a glass of tea with him and myself, flung himself into the saddle and was off home.

Here also I was interrogated and had to show my papers, but these were only formalities, and my host's hospitality left nothing to be desired. This time I supped in the commandant's tent, sitting on my haunches on the floor in front of a wooden trough, like the rest of the party. The trough contained, instead of boiled beef, a thick, greenish liquid that stank like—well, it stank so badly that I recoiled in secret terror at the thought that I was expected to eat—or drink—from it. But my companions had already dipped their cups into the trough and emptied them with apparent enjoyment, so, in order not to offend my host, I braced myself and heroically took a sip from the mysterious concoction.

"*Ite, ite, ine bina*" ("Eat, eat, it's good") prompted my host, and I swallowed hard.

To my surprise the "soup" did not taste half so awful as it smelt, and in the end I took my fill of it, like my Mongolian friends.

It was only later that I realised what this new dish was, and that I had, in fact, witnessed most of the process of its preparation. Earlier in the evening the commandant's adjutant had gone out with his blunderbuss—the Mongolian hunter's usual weapon, home-

made except for the barrel—and had brought back a deer. I saw him skin the animal and draw it. The liver, lungs, heart and kidneys he placed on a board, then he proceeded to deal with the intestines by cutting them up into lengths and cleaning them out. The process of cleaning was simplicity itself. The hunter took one end of each length between the finger and thumb of his left hand and squeezed it out with the finger and thumb of his right, after which he laid the lengths of intestine on the grass. This method of cleaning intestines may not have been in accordance with European requirements of cleanliness and hygiene, but the Mongolian seemed perfectly satisfied with the result and the intestines, together with the animal's organs and some vegetables, were thrown into a copper of boiling water that was kept in readiness on the *tagan* in the commandant's tent. When the meat was done the concoction was poured into the wooden trough in which it was served when the solid ingredients had been cut up into small pieces.

I stayed at this station for two days and made several meals of this same dish while the deer lasted. The smell did not bother me in the least after the first occasion, and I should imagine that my Mongolian friends regard the odour of their venison stew as particularly appetising.

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My lengthy sojourn at this station was due to the fact that, for some reason that I could not fathom, my escort for the next stretch of my journey was to be not

an ordinary *urton* rider but a government official, who did not arrive until the third day. He was a gaunt old man, and he preferred to ride at a comfortable pace. We left the *urton* in the morning and rode into what is perhaps the wildest part of Mongolia. We were on rising ground, climbing higher and higher among barren rocks and through dense forests until with great difficulty we reached the *Hamar Daban Pass* that was to take us over the mighty peak of the *Tannu-ola*. There was danger lurking at every step of our climb, but the Pass was more dangerous still. There was a terrible swamp on top of the mountain. At one point my horse suddenly sank into the soft ground up to the knees, and it was only with difficulty that I struggled clear. There were puddles of water gleaming in the sun here and there, but the apparently dry ground was treacherous and a false step might have meant an untimely end to my adventure. The old Mongolian told me to drop the reins and let my mount go where it liked; it would find a path by instinct far better than I could direct it. We made slow progress, advancing step by step, and before we knew it night was upon us. There we were, in the middle of the swamp, with the wonderful star-studded cupola of the Mongolian sky above us, death lying in wait in every inch before us, and hope in every inch that we managed to leave safely behind. Leaping will-o'-the-wisps and the distant sounds of barking wolves added to the horror of the night. I do not know at what precise moment we got clear of the swamp, for the dangers of the rest of that night's journey were scarcely less when it led

us across steep rocks, dense forest or barren steppes. It was only towards dawn, when the rim of the sun became visible among silver clouds on the far horizon, that we breathed more freely. There was a flowing brook in front of us, and on its bank a few tents, with cattle grazing on the steppe. Within a few minutes of our arrival I was asleep in one of the tents. A few hours later I was awakened by the aged Mongolian. He looked completely rested and showed no trace of the previous night's ordeal. The horses were already saddled, and after drinking a few glasses of tea together we were off again.

* * * *

For eight whole days we travelled like this, riding all day, and sometimes most of the night, over territory which I vainly tried to locate on the maps I carried, and relying for food and shelter on the hospitality of the nomads we encountered as we went.

On the eighth day my guide said farewell to me, and left me to my own devices, riding away towards the west, while I was making for the east. Thus I found myself alone in the middle of the limitless steppe, with no human habitation for hundreds of miles, except for a few wandering nomads at vast distances from one another. However, I rode on, happy in spite of all my loneliness and uncertainty that, thanks to the Said's generosity, I was at least provided with a mount. Sometimes I stayed in the saddle from early dawn till ten or eleven o'clock at night before I came upon an encampment, and when I lay down to rest at

nights I did not know where I was and the kindly Mongolian nomads who befriended me could not enlighten me. All I knew was that Urga lay to the south-east and that was the direction to which I endeavoured to keep. In any case, I was under the impression that I was still somewhere on a regular *urton* line and could not, therefore, go astray.

Travelling on horseback on the Mongolian steppe was no picnic, however. The days were grillingly hot, and the nights cruelly cold, and many a time did I tumble off my horse, dead beat, and lay on the ground too exhausted to think. At last, with fear in my heart, I realised that I had strayed off the *urton* line and was now really alone. To add to my troubles my mount died and I was now in a region, near the source of the Yenissey river, where horses were rare, so that some encampments had not more than a single horse. However, the Mongolian code of hospitality saw me through. They escorted me from one encampment to another, and if there was only one mount it was I who occupied the saddle, with my escort sitting behind me, his arms round my body. Sometimes hospitality went even further and there were camps where I was detained for two or three days, which I spent with my hosts drinking *archi*, an alcoholic drink made from milk, and generally making merry.

Here, in the heart of the steppe, meat was but rarely included in the diet, which for the most part consisted of milk, cheese, butter and tea. These Mongolians seemed to live almost entirely on a variety of milk dishes—tea with milk and dried cheese for breakfast;

then, for the rest of the day, *erik*, or *urum*. The former is a sort of fermented cows' milk with an admixture of a large proportion of mares' milk where this was available. Among the Tartars *erik* is known as *kumis*; it is a potent drink, and after two or three pints of it I was as "tight" as if I had drunk a considerable quantity of beer. *Urum* possesses the sweetness of fresh milk, the velvety smoothness of cream, with a peculiar, cheesy taste. I gathered from my hosts that it was customary in that region to economise with meat in the summer, when no domestic animals are killed and meat is only eaten after a successful hunt.

I strayed round the steppe in this way for weeks, not knowing whether I was on the right track, but one thing was certain—I was living "like a lord" and, in spite of my troubles, putting on flesh.

VIII

THE MONGOLIAN GIRL

AT one encampment I was given a young boy as my guide to the next group of tents. With him I made more rapid progress than with an adult guide, but whether I was getting any nearer to Uliasutai—my immediate goal—I still did not know. The Mongolians are wonderfully familiar with the steppe, down to the smallest bend of the smallest brook, but the flaw in their minute topographical knowledge is the fact that it does not extend beyond their own district or the usual run of their own tribe. So it would have been useless for me to ask my guide what lay beyond the boundary of his district. I was certain, however, that I was not getting any nearer to the *urton* line, and I developed a suspicion that the Mongolians were only befriending me, giving me fresh horses or oxen, out of respect for the *bichik*, or passport. They were sending me on and on and on, and that was all. I was living in hopes that someone would eventually put me right.

After riding along for some 25 miles, my ears suddenly caught the distant sounds of barking dogs. An encampment at last! As we reached the tents a brown, shiny face appeared in the doorway of one of them.

"*Hanas?*" inquired the face.

The boy slithered out of the saddle and embarked on a long explanation. I impatiently interrupted.

"I want to go to Uliasutai."

The Mongolian stepped out of the tent and after rubbing his forehead and shaking his head, he burst out laughing.

"Uliasutai is not in this direction."

"Well, where?"

"You have to go back," was the reply.

I argued that Uliasutai must be in that direction after all, as I had been travelling south-eastwards all the time. The Mongolian could not understand me.

"No, no," he said, "you must go back. This is not the right way."

Accordingly we rode back the way we came, turning south, in the direction of a vast mountain. The little Mongolian horses walked with a sure step on the loose stones up the steep track, climbing higher and higher, until, at a bend, we came to a precipice dropping sheer into the roaring waters of the Cagan-Usu down below. Here the track narrowed to a mere path of barely two feet, with a steep wall of rock rising above us—a single false step and . . . But the horses took no notice of the yawning menace, and continued to trot along, placing their hooves in front of one another in an almost straight line, and climbing higher and higher. It took us five hours to reach the valley, where there were already camel caravans winding their way among the trees. After a time we found ourselves in a fertile steppe, with more and more herds; here and there there were black yaks

peacefully grazing with the cattle.

We frequently met Mongolians arrayed in magnificent silk robes—pilgrims making for the monasteries nearby. Encampments were more frequent, too, and lamas in their yellow robes were visiting the tents, collecting gifts for the monasteries. It was an entirely different world from that of the steppe through which I had passed, a world teeming with life. I could not understand why my hosts of the previous day had not mentioned all this. Or perhaps they did not know? That was just as likely, for Mongolia is inhabited by groups of people who know nothing about one another, and that, in fact, has always been the greatest obstacle to the creation of a united Mongolian nation.

At the first large encampment we halted for a rest. The Mongolian who was to be my host—entertaining strange visitors is taken by rotation—was not at home and I was welcomed by his wife and a young daughter. They seemed immensely pleased and their dark brown eyes shone with excitement as, without embarrassment, they looked me up and down. Apparently they had never seen a European before. The girl walked round me, giggling and squeaking with joy. She was a lovely creature, her soft silken robe, which seemed to caress her fresh, young body, revealed more than it concealed, and, not having seen a pretty woman for years, I took an instant liking to her. Suddenly she swung herself into my saddle and galloped away, her long black hair flying behind her in the wind. When she returned her mother sharply ordered her to fetch some water.

The girl dismounted, and tucking her hair into her belt, at the back, she set off with a can for a nearby spinney. I exchanged a few more words with the mother, then under some pretext I left her and slunk after the daughter. Guided by the sound of feminine chatter and laughter I walked to the far end of the spinney and hiding behind a tree I watched and listened. My host's daughter, amid bursts of laughter, was telling several other girls the news of my arrival. From what I could gather she was saying that I was a very strange sort of man, but entirely like a man, nevertheless.

When I stepped out from my hiding-place I was received with frightened looks and the girls, all except one, hurried away, giggling and talking. The exception was my host's daughter. She calmly sat down in the grass and waited for me. Thus encouraged, I sat down beside her and tried to engage her in conversation. It was not a particularly brilliant effort on my part, for my Mongolian left much to be desired, but, probably, my manner conveyed to the girl more than my words, for she eyed me uncertainly and seemed somewhat disturbed. However, she showed little resistance when I grabbed her bare arm and there was even challenge in her dark eyes. I drew her to myself and kissed her. That seemed to scare her for a moment. She drew back and—burst into loud laughter. At this moment there came a deep, rumbling voice from the edge of the spinney.

"*Sein beina*" ("Good day") it said. It belonged to a colossal Mongolian who was standing with his

back to the trees. The girl ran up to the man, and hugging him she shouted back to me:

"My father. Come here."

I fervently wished that the earth would open under me. For a split second I debated with myself whether I should respond to the girl's call or run for my life. However, realising that any attempt at escape would be futile, I leapt to my feet and, trying not to look as scared as I felt, I walked towards the man and stopped a few paces from him, prepared for the worst. The Mongolian came forward. I stood my ground, desperately repressing the urge to run. But when he was quite close to me his stern features relaxed and holding out to me his upturned palms—the Mongolian equivalent of a handshake—he said, in a voice whose friendliness sounded to me like music:

"My wife told me you'd arrived. I've been looking for you everywhere already. I'm delighted to offer you hospitality. Come along—there's a lot to talk about."

I placed my palms on his, in acknowledgment of his greeting, then the three of us made our way back to the tent in perfect friendship, as though nothing had happened. The girl gave me a few mischievous glances, but her father took no notice of her and kept reiterating his delight at my arrival.

I was rather puzzled, though at the same time considerably relieved, by the old man's attitude over the affair with his daughter and the fact that he did not even refer to it. Later, when I became better acquainted with Mongolian customs, I understood.

The Mongolians are so hospitable that once they have admitted a stranger to their house—or tent—they endeavour to study his pleasure in all things. Sometimes their hospitality goes so far that the host's wife or daughter is offered to the guest for the night. The reason for the girl's laughter after I had kissed was another matter about which enlightenment only came after the event. I found that kissing is not practised in Mongolia. If two people love each other they express this romantic emotion by smelling each other all over. That was why, when films were first shown in Urga, the capital, the Mongolian audience burst into hilarious laughter at the sight of the kisses that close every screen story.

IX

“WE HAVE BEEN EXPLOITED”

THE rest of that day I spent resting and eating. My hostess treated me to the pick of her larder, while her husband entertained me with interesting talk. When he learned about my adventures of the previous days he was quite angry.

“They ought to be ashamed of themselves,” he said. “This’ll give you a poor opinion of our country.”

I tried to make excuses for my previous guides, but the Mongolian would not have it and continued to abuse his ignorant countrymen, and finally he launched out on a long lecture about Mongolia.

“Don’t think,” he said, “that all Mongolians are so stupid. They”—he pointed towards the mountains—“they are very poor and never leave their district. In the summer they wander about in the steppe, and in the winter they go back to the forest. They just manage to keep body and soul together with a few cattle or yaks, or a few *chainich* (cross between cattle and yaks).

The reason they were obliged to move about like this (explained my host) was that these ignorant nomads do not store fodder in the summer, but merely let their cattle out to graze, so that with the advent of the cold season, when there is no grass on the steppe,

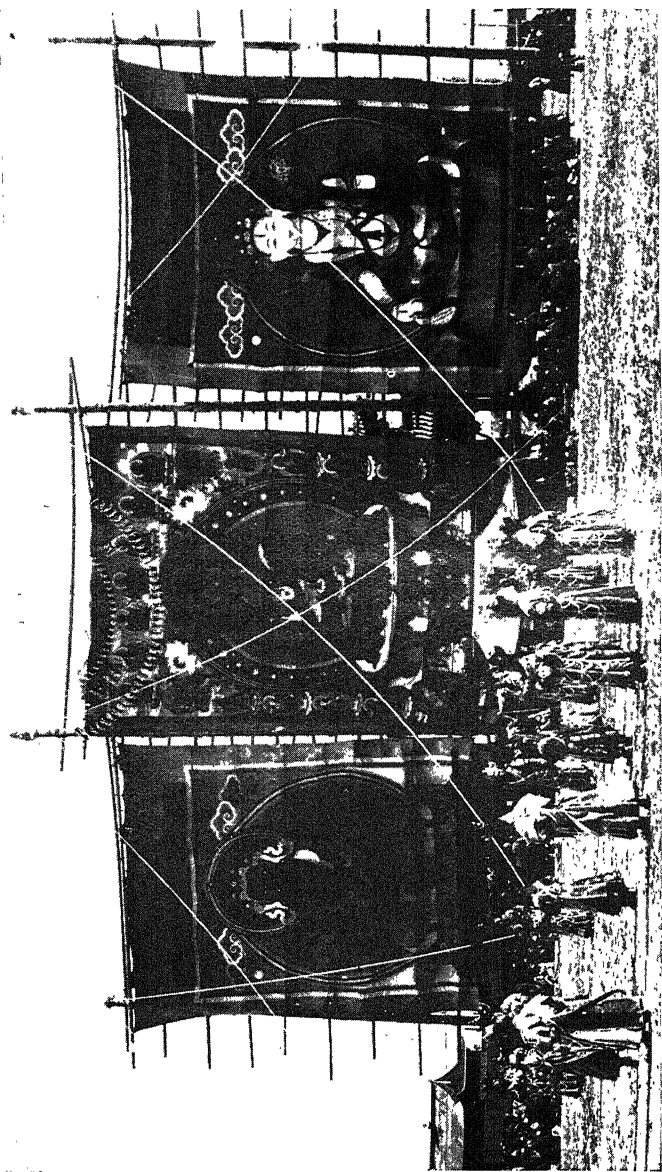
they must pitch their tents in the forest for the sake of the plants and roots that the cattle always find there under the trees. They never cross the *chasun* (county) boundaries. Every *chont* (tribe) keeps within the tract of pasture land allotted to it, and if this is inadequate they have to apply to the Said for more land. Here and there, particularly in the western part of the steppe, the population also engage in agriculture, but they only succeed in growing sufficient for their barest needs. Their principal source of income is cattle-raising, from which the Mongolian derives not only his food but also his clothing and his building materials and which he also uses as his means of communication and payment. To the Mongolian his herd is everything. He has no greater ambition than to possess more and more cattle. A man's wealth is always expressed in cattle, and nearly every commodity in Mongolia has its fixed value in sheep, yaks, horses and other animals.

There is an old legend about Mongolia's richness in domestic animals. It happened that Mergen Van (Duke Mergen)—a wealthy Mongolian—was in Peking on a visit to the Emperor of China and in the course of conversation the two began to brag about their respective possessions. The Emperor said he had so much silver that he could pave the road from Peking to Urga with silver *iambos* (discs weighing about 2 lb.).

"And I," replied Mergen proudly, "I have so many camels that if I were to make a caravan of them the beginning of the procession would reach Peking



RAVING SHAMAN



LAMAS PRAYING IN FRONT OF GIGANTIC SACRED PICTURES

before the end of it left Urga.”

The Emperor jocularly expressed his doubts, and Mergen Van, to prove the truth of his statement, galloped home and made arrangements to convince the Emperor. Soon the road between Urga and Peking—875 miles—was yellow with camels and, according to the legend, the last camel left Mergen Van’s court at the precise moment when the van of the caravan reached the Emperor’s palace in Peking.

Expressed in figures, Mongolia’s annual production of animal products is as follows:

Beef	50 million <i>gins</i> (1 <i>gin</i> = 1 lb. 6 oz.)
Mutton	70 million <i>gins</i>
Wool	23 million <i>gins</i>
Camel’s hair	2½ million <i>gins</i>
Horsehair	2 million <i>gins</i>
Sheepskins	3½ millions
Cow-hides	500,000
Horse-hides	500,000
Milk	120 million <i>pails</i> (1 <i>pail</i> = 13 quarts)

It is only natural that the Mongolians should pay the utmost attention to their cattle, and their government is doing everything in its power to help them in any major difficulty arising from unfavourable weather or epidemics. The worst foe of the cattle is cattle pestilence, with which the Mongolian Government has now, however, learnt to deal successfully. There are three different centres, with the most

modern equipment, where cattle are inoculated free of charge against this dread disease.

* * * *

My host, over a glass of tea, also explained the measures taken by the Government to prevent the land from falling into the hands of the Chinese, who are cleverer and better trained than the Mongolians. The Chinese settler is not allowed to buy land, as all land has from time immemorial belonged to the State. He can only lease a piece of land. The rental is very low, but the maximum period of the lease is 12 years, after which the Chinese farmer must leave it. He may apply for another piece of land elsewhere and start all over again, which is just what the Mongolian Government wants him to do, for in this way the Chinaman's almost unlimited capacity for work and great tenacity is exploited to increase the fertility of the land.

My host spoke about the advantages of this system with obvious pride.

"Our people," he said, "do not know how to take the first step; they've been wandering about in the steppe so long without anyone taking any notice of them. Everybody was out to rob us, to exploit us. But we're putting an end to that. Mongolia is going to be free and we are going to be masters in our own country. You come from Russia, the land of our enemies. But even they are less dangerous than the Chinese. They work like beasts and hardly eat. They are satisfied with our leavings, which we throw away.

‘‘ WE HAVE BEEN EXPLOITED ’’

In the past they exploited us because they were more cunning and cleverer than we. But we won't let them any more. You wait and see what's going to happen here.”

He spoke with a vehemence that surprised me no less than this tent-dweller's well-informed talk on all sorts of other subjects. Apparently the descendants of Djenghis Khan have awakened to the fact that they have a destiny to fulfil in the modern world and are determined to proceed with wise prudence and a clear idea of their goal.

“HE’LL BE A GREAT MAN . . .”

AT dawn the next morning, accompanied by my host’s son, I continued my journey, riding south-east. Forging the River Tes, which was only a few hundred yards from the encampment where I had spent the night, we descended into the Tes Valley, striking an encampment here and there and sometimes obtaining sufficiently precise information as to my whereabouts to make notes on my map. At one point in the valley, riding through a grove of willows and red pine, we suddenly espied among the trees three Mongolian tents and a log cabin and, in front of them, we saw three men busily engaged in spreading out animal hides to dry. One of them was a typical Russian, a tall, powerful figure, with fair hair ruffled by the wind, while the other two were just as typical Mongolians. When the Russian caught sight of us he seemed surprised, no doubt because he concluded from my dress that I too was Russian.

I dismounted and we mutually introduced ourselves. His name was Maslov. I immediately began to question him, hoping that he could tell me where I was. But Maslov could not get over his surprise to see me there at all.

“How on earth did you get here?” he asked.

“‘HE’LL BE A GREAT MAN . . .’”

“I can’t tell you that, because I don’t know myself,” I replied. “But I can tell you why I am here—I am an escaped prisoner of war.”

At that the Russian’s face immediately assumed a friendly expression, and he invited me into his tent. One of his Mongolians took charge of my mount and Maslov and I went into the tent. Very soon we were fast friends and Maslov begged me to stay with him for a few days.

* * * *

We had *bandjinab*—Chinese gin distilled from a plant—with our lunch, in addition to excellent tea with sugar. In the course of our conversation I learned that Uliasutai was a good two hundred miles away and that I would have to go from there to Urga, as it was impossible to make straight for Peking across the Gobi Desert as I had planned. Maslov also told me that Urga was in the hands of the Chinese and that it would be necessary for me to obtain a Chinese passport in Uliasutai.

Maslov seemed to know a great deal about Mongolia and he gave me some interesting information about the customs and history of the country.

* * * *

In the twelfth century the southern part of Siberia, from the Altai Mountains to Bui-Nor and from Turkestan to China, was inhabited by Mongolian tribes, who lived as such and lacked all national consciousness. The first large unit among them were

the Tartars who, contrary to the general belief, were not racially identical with the Tartars of to-day, but belonged to a race then known as the *Naimans*. In the middle of the twelfth century Bordjighi, a great Tartar leader, united the many tribes living between the Anon and Kerulun rivers which, though closely related to each other, had until then led an independent existence, and gave them the mythological name *Mongol*. The original Mongols, according to the old Shaman religion, were a mighty tribe that disappeared in the storm of the ages.

During the second half of the twelfth century the united Mongols became increasingly powerful, and the Chinese Empire felt so seriously menaced by them that the Golden Dynasty incited the Tartars to rebellion against the Mongols.

At about this time, a little after the year 1150, was born the child who was to weld the warring factions of his people into one powerful whole. The event occurred at Delium Bolda, a small settlement of herdsmen on the bank of the River Anon, which is a place of pilgrimage to this day. The new-born child, according to legend, was clutching in his fist a piece of congealed blood, which the Shaman soothsayers regarded as a propitious sign.

"He's going to be a great man," they said.

At the moment of the child's birth his father arrived from a successful Tartar campaign, bringing with him two prisoners of war. The stronger was called Temudjin, and for this reason the child was also so named, as it was always—and still is—the

custom in Mongolia to name a male child after any special event associated with its birth.

When Temudjin was still little more than a child his father was poisoned by the Tartars, and he and his elder brothers were obliged to go on distant hunting expeditions to support themselves and their mother. Hard toil and constant danger and privation brought out in Temudjin the qualities of fearlessness and resolution, while his mother’s frequent reminders of his high destiny prepared him on the spiritual side for the task of restoring the glory of the name “Mongol,” and of re-establishing the mighty Mongolia of mythology.

Temudjin’s skill and courage won him many adherents in his tribe and after a successful martial adventure they elected him khan, renaming him Djenghis, or “mighty.”

Djenghis Khan became the founder of Mongolia, and his armies, shortly after his rise to power, conquered their way as far as Europe, burning down cities, exterminating their inhabitants, and wiping out whole races as they went. But they dealt with their neighbours first. Djenghis Khan organised his tribes into a powerful military machine and proceeded to beat, one after the other, the armies of China, Persia and Russia. He did not personally lead his armies into battle but elaborated his plans far from the theatre of war and had them carried out by his subordinates, and much of his strength probably lay in his capacity to choose his subordinates well. He employed everybody who could be of use to him and retained full control

over all his men. His court was visited by the wealthiest Mohammedan merchants, from whom he gathered information about the geographical and political conditions in adjacent countries, while Chinese scientists and Persian engineers served him in their various ways, the latter by constructing his artillery.

Djenghis Khan had rich rewards for those who served him, but ruthlessly discarded or crushed those who dared to stand in his way. He had the high priest executed, and the Turkestan, Russian and Chinese cities that resisted him consigned to the flames. He made himself master of Tibet and wanted to embody in his empire the whole world. According to legend Djenghis Khan believed that the Mongol people were the sons of the "blue firmament," and he was their heaven-elected leader, whose task it was to unite his people and take revenge on their enemies.

But Djenghis Khan was not content with wars and conquests alone. He also organised his Empire administratively and awakened in his people a national consciousness which is a source of strength to them to this day. Neither the Russians, nor the Chinese, nor yet the currents that prevailed in the country after the Russian protectorate, have succeeded in rooting out the memory of Djenghis Khan. Under all regimes, even when under a foreign yoke, the seal of the Mongolian State has borne Djenghis Khan's crest (the sun enclosed by the moon, with a fire-brand above them). And in the capital of Mongolia, at the Breven Chit monastery, they are still guarding a

sword and a saddle which, according to legend, belonged to Djenghis Khan.

Djenghis Khan’s successor was Eghedei Khan, under whom the Tartars invaded Europe and laid waste the greater part of Hungary. Kubilei Khan was Mongolia’s next ruler, after whose death internecine strife between the many princes who wanted to wrest power to themselves, led to the decline of the country’s power. Its foreign conquests were lost and its boundaries contracted to practically the same dimensions as before the great Djenghis.

With the introduction of Buddhism the Mongolians’ warlike spirit was completely crushed out. The country was too weak to deal single-handed with its external enemies and Mongolia therefore concluded an alliance with Manchuria, of which it later became a vassal State. And when the Manchu dynasty conquered China, Mongolia, as a province belonging to the Crown, was incorporated in the Chinese Empire. Mongolia did not regain her independence until the beginning of the twentieth century, after the Chinese Revolution. But she did not enjoy her newly won freedom for long. Both Russia and China began to harry Mongolia on the one hand and, on the other hand, engaged in a struggle with each other for possession of the country. China needed new territories for colonisation, while Russia wanted the Gobi Desert for strategic purposes. During the succeeding years Mongolia with varying fortunes was either enjoying brief spells of independence or alternately falling under Russian and Chinese influence.

The year 1912 saw the beginning of a new chapter in Mongolian history. It was then that the country first came under the protectorate of her northern neighbour, and thereby became acquainted with Western "civilisation" and "morality," though that was not Russia's object in imposing the protectorate. What Russia wanted was a more convenient way of securing her frontiers in that part of the world. At all events, from 1912 onwards the Mongolians became the representatives of the Russian people, and therefore of western ideas, in Asia.

* * * *

The *Bogdo Gegen*—Holy Ruler—was the highest church dignitary and at the same time also the temporal head of the Mongolians and lived in Urga. These theocratic rulers were Buddhist monks, but were not excessively puritanical in their morals. The majority of them were not native Mongolians but Tibetans, and were not particularly interested in the fate of Mongolia.

The last *Bogdo Gegen* died in the spring of 1924. At present Buddhism has only two spiritual heads of equal status to the now extinct dignity of the *Bogdos*—the Dalai Lama at Lhasa and the Grand Lama at Peking. All these high priests are held to be reincarnations of a figure of Buddhist mythology, reincarnation being a basic principle of the Buddhist faith. Thus the Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of one of the *bodhisatvas*, or divine beings, named Avolakitesvari or, in Tibetan, *Pagba-Chan-Re-Sity*. The *Bogdo*

“ ‘HE’LL BE A GREAT MAN . . .’ ”

Gegen of Urga was the reincarnation of Djam-Yan-Djordje-Choriche-Dasyi-Baldan, a disciple of Tson-Kava, the reformer of Buddhism and founder of Lamaism. The last *Bogdo Gegen* was called Che-Dzun-Damba-Chutuktu. This was his *name* and not, as Ossendovsky writes, a title conferred upon him by the Russians.

The Mongolian Revolutionary Government exploited in an interesting manner the ancient legend according to which Conchava's excellent disciple was to experience reincarnation eight times. Che-Dzun-Damba was eighth in the line and when, on May 26, 1924, he died, the Government issued a proclamation referring to the legend and adding: "Buddha's will has been fulfilled, the spirit of the *Bogdo Gegen*, after his eighth reincarnation, has gone to Nirvana and will not return to earth again." Even the most fanatical lamas were obliged to swallow that.

XI

THE DALAI LAMA AT URGU

THE selection of the Grand Lama is always an event of great importance in the country where it occurs. When a Grand Lama dies the lamas of the monasteries scattered all over the country go out among the people in search of male children who were born at the moment of the high priest's decease and whose birth was associated with some peculiar event or whose bodies bear some peculiar mark. A register of such children is then compiled by the lamas, who select the most curious cases for submission to Lhasa. It is for the "red-cap" lamas to decide which child is the true incarnation.

Their selection is immediately moved to the palace of the deceased Grand Lama, where he is brought up and educated until the age of eighteen years. Meanwhile, the country is ruled, both in the religious and political sense, by a regency council composed of lamas. The choice for Grand Lama almost invariably falls on a Tibetan, Mongolian or Chinese child of poor family, because the lamas want to guard against the supreme power falling into the hands of rich and already influential families.

The Grand Lamas when they meet at Buddhist ceremonials usually salute each other with every show

of homage and devotion, but in secret they intrigue against each other, as neither is prepared to recognise the other's supremacy.

There is only one recorded instance of an open breach between two Grand Lamas. That was when the Dalai Lama "punished" the *Bogdo Gegen* of the day. The former had, in the year 1903, taken refuge in Urga from the English military expedition sent against him to Lhasa and, disapproving of the *Bogdo Gegen's* immoral mode of life, he "punished" him by refusing to call on him or to receive him, and stayed alone at the Ganden monastery, the largest in Urga, until the danger was over.

The Russians for political reasons had for long been trying to win the favour of the master of Tibet; they wanted to bring the territories bordering on British India under their influence. This was one of the indirect causes of the English military expedition of 1903-1904 against Lhasa, capital of Tibet, and seat of the Dalai Lama.

However, the Russians tried to make capital even of the Dalai Lama's flight. To demonstrate their "love" for him they made Buddhist religious pictures shot with gold and silver thread and sent them to Urga by a brilliant mission. Two of these pictures, woven in silk, remained in Urga. The Dalai Lama before returning to Lhasa presented them to Cocto-Badma-Zhap, a Mongolian scholar and grand seigneur whose family tree reaches back to Djenghis Khan. Long after my meeting with Maslov, who first told me about these things, Cocto-Badma-Zhap made me a

present of one of the pictures. It is a portrait of *Cagan-Dava*, the White Hermit who, according to legend, was a holy man living alone in the Gobi Desert, fed by deer and birds. Cagan-Dava loved animals, knew their language and even savage beasts approached him with affection. The Buddhist hermit's stick, which bears a remarkable resemblance to a crosier, is clearly discernible in the picture.

In 1912 the *Bogdo Gegen*, under the stage-management of the Russian government, was crowned, and this monk, whose religion bound him to celibacy, was accompanied by his wife in the procession to the Ganden monastery and back to the Bogdo Chure, his own palace. The Mongolian lamas dared not provoke him and the Russians, and not only offered no opposition but, on the contrary, assisted in the ceremony.

It was at this period that the Mongolian people began to realise that eternal contemplation and submission led nowhere, unless to destruction, and that the only effective answer to foreign oppression and the might of arms lay in national unity. The development of this idea in the minds of the people was for a long time hampered by the struggle between Russia and China over the body of Mongolia, but the Mongolian people was, nevertheless, after centuries of religious contemplation, evolving a national consciousness. The conviction that the Mongolian people had an historical right to self-determination began to gain ground, chiefly as a result of the work of a small band of Mongolian patriots who had enjoyed a European

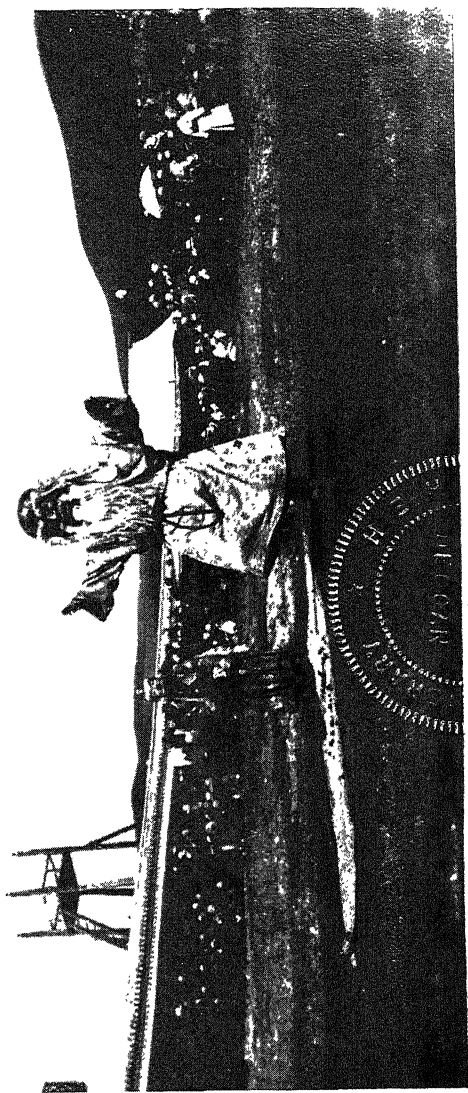
education, like Djam-Sarano, Sam-Pilon, Cocto-Badma-Zhap and others.

Then came the Pan-Mongolian movement, initiated and supported by Japan. It advanced the cause of Mongolian independence in spite of the fact that Japan's sole aim was to incite the Mongolians to resistance against the Russians and the Chinese. The European war prepared the ground still further. With Russia's defeat her prestige in Mongolia dwindled to nothing. The "invincible" White Tsar's crown lay in the dust, and his Empire was riven by civil war and revolution. The White and Red Russians were vying with each other for Mongolia's favour, and in those chaotic days the awakened Mongolians feverishly began with the regeneration of their country. They wanted to create a Greater Mongolia from Outer and Inner Mongolia and the territories that were then under Russian and Chinese rule.

But the European Great Powers refused to recognise Greater Mongolia. Meanwhile, the Russian White armies began to crumble and part of the routed White hordes fled in a direction where they expected the least resistance—into Mongolia. The starving, ragged and morally rotten Whites lived by plunder and behaved as though they owned the Mongolian Empire. The Mongolians were unable to defend themselves against the well-armed White hordes, so they called China to their assistance. The Chinese did not wait to be asked twice and invaded the country with almost incredible rapidity. But they committed the grave error of offending the *Bogdo Gegen*, with the con-

sequence that the vain and ambitious Tibetan gave his support to Baron Ungern-Sternberg, who, at the head of his Russian White army, occupied the whole of Outer Mongolia within six months. That was in 1920. The Baron received considerable assistance from a section of the Mongolian people, who have a traditional hatred for the Chinese. But to-day Mongolia remembers his name with horror and execration, for Ungern-Sternberg obtained their aid with lying promises and then proceeded to pillage the "liberated" territories.

In 1921, as a direct result of Ungern-Sternberg's activities, the whole of Mongolia was swept by a veritable tornado of hatred directed indiscriminately against all foreigners. The *chalcha* Mongols, or pure-bred Mongolians, formed into military groups and demanded the extermination or expulsion of all foreigners and the establishment of an independent national State. The party was led by the lama Dja. Dja operated in Kobdo and by his frenzied oratory roused the Mongolians to an insane fanaticism. He was a dangerous antagonist to the Russians, for in his youth he had lived in Russia, had even been in prison there for a political offence, and knew their methods. On the other hand, there was a widespread belief among his Mongol adherents that he was the reincarnation of the last great Mongol king who had founded an empire in Russian territory and who was said to have embodied in his will a message to the Mongolian people to the effect that his reincarnation in a later age, starting from the Mongolia of his day,



“DEVIL” AND “OLD MAN” GAME AT CAM FESTIVAL



LAMAS CARRYING PRAYER FLAGS DURING MAIDERI FESTIVAL



WAITING CROWD OUTSIDE THE MONASTERY DURING CAM
PERFORMANCE

would reconquer the lost territories. According to popular belief Dja Lama was a "red-cap" lama, the possessor of the *tantara*, or a knowledge of secret magic, a man who had visited the Monastery of Eternal Life, the habitat of the immortal lamas. The latter, so the Mongolian people believe, are capable of defying gravitation and floating or flying in the air without mechanical aids.

Whilst Dja, free from all foreign influence, was working for his people in Kobdo, a small group of intellectuals at Urga, headed by Djam-Sarano, was organising for a great political struggle. The circumstances were not unfavourable. Baron Ungern-Sternberg's days were numbered. He had the Reds against him, and it was obvious that with his few thousand Whites he could not long withstand the might of the Red Army. The Urga organisation, against their inclination and convictions, established contact with the Reds in an attempt to prevent a Red invasion, while at the same time ensuring the destruction of Ungern-Sternberg's terrorist hordes.

Djam-Sarano accordingly led a delegation to the Reds and told them that Mongolia wished to live in neighbourly friendship with Russia, Mongolia being convinced that Soviet Russia was the sole protector of small nations. The Mongolians, of course, were consciously insincere, and the Reds were perfectly well aware of this; yet the delegation served its purpose and the Reds never treated Mongolia otherwise than as a friend.

THE NEW MONGOLIA

Part of this I learned from my friend Maslov, and the rest in the course of my subsequent stay in Mongolia, but I record it all here briefly by way of introduction.

XII

VANGIN-CHURE

BY the third day Maslov and I were firm friends, and the Russian was genuinely sorry to see me go. He gave me his best saddle horse, a guide from among his labourers, and also a letter of introduction to a Mongolian at Vangin-Chure.

We reached Vangin-Chure, the first Mongolian town I had seen up till then, after a few hours' ride through lovely scenery. The houses were made of timber, with the window-frames everywhere painted red. But there was no glass in the windows, only white paper or linen. The roofs curled back at the corners after the Chinese style, and were hung with gilt balls, cones and bells. There were countless coloured silk banners waving from the roofs, painted with fantastic images of various deities and inscribed with Mongolian, Chinese and Tibetan prayers. The large elaborately carved red gates were flanked on both sides by a fence constructed from sharply-pointed stakes. Each house had several court-yards, occupied by small red-painted outhouses and white Mongol tents. Vangin-Chure is really a vast monastery, mainly inhabited by lamas, hence the word *Chure*, which means monastery, in the name of the town. Gleaming whitely in the distance beyond the town

was the palace of the Duke of Vankurini, a building of several storeys with rows of low Chinese log huts crouching humbly behind it.

As we rode into the town we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of people, mainly Mongolian women dressed in brightly-coloured silk robes and wearing a typical head-dress trimmed with silver and hung with precious stones. The streets were thronged everywhere and the festive dress of the crowd made a colourful picture in the bright sunshine. I learned that Vangin was preparing for the *Cam*, one of the most important religious and national festivals of the Mongolian people.

The men's dress was hardly less resplendent than that of the women. All had finely wrought knives and fire-lighters in the sash of their silk robes. These knives look formidable, but it would be a mistake to suppose that they are carried as weapons of offence or defence. The knife which every Mongolian male constantly carries in his belt is for "domestic" uses, for cutting up food, and the sheath in which it is kept also contains two small wooden or bone sticks which are similarly used in eating. I have often watched in amazement as my Mongolian friends drank their soup with the aid of these little sticks. What they do is to whip up the liquid with the sticks, then lap it up quickly, somewhat like a dog. They use the sticks with wonderful skill, not only in drinking soup and eating rice and *kasha* but also in lifting heavy pieces of meat. The Mongolian is very proud of his cutlery set, and the sheath in which it is kept as

well as the hilt of the knife are finely wrought in silver.

Like nearly all fine metal work in Mongolia, these cutlery sets are generally made by the lamas, but not always in silver, which is comparatively malleable. Frequently they use the hardest steel, into which they carve microscopic designs with the most wonderful precision. I was told that some of these masterpieces of the metal-worker's art take months, and even years, to complete and are immensely valuable.

The well-to-do Mongolians also carry in their belts pipe-cleaners wrought in silver or in the more expensive steel.

* * * *

Most of the "shops" in Vangin-Chure are really only covered stalls erected in the open, yet they are surprisingly well-stocked with all sorts of goods, from Southern Chinese cane sugar to strychnine from Hungary, and from ordinary cotton fabrics to the most expensive silks. There are also a few really big stores, with separate departments for articles of food and clothing, fancy goods, and anything else the customer may require.

The Mongolian or Chinese shopkeeper does not insist on payment in cash and a considerable proportion of his trade is transacted by barter. That was how, for instance, I once bought a pipe in exchange for a number of silk ribbons.

However, both buyer and seller must have strong lungs, for prolonged bargaining is an indispensable part of every transaction.

There are thousands of *dablembas* (a *dahlemba* is a six-yard length of dyed cotton cloth) lying in mountainous heaps on the stalls, with crowds of people standing round, spitting on the *dablembas* and rubbing them to see whether the colours are fast, or looking through them and pulling out a thread here and there to ascertain the quality of the yarn.

I once witnessed the negotiations for a *dablemba* between a Mongolian and a Chinese stall-keeper. It was an edifying experience.

The customer stood for about half an hour examining, pulling, kneading and crumpling up the *dablemba* of his fancy, then he casually said:

“*Yad zen?*” (How much?)

“Three bricks of tea,” came the placid reply.

“Show me something better. This is too weak, too narrow and too short, and the colours aren’t fast. *Bi sey chereketey.*” (I want a good one.)

The Chinaman seemed to realise that this was a serious customer—otherwise he would not criticise the goods. So, without replying to the Mongolian’s objections he fetched a tea urn and poured him a glass of tea and gave him also a pipeful of tobacco. Then, still without speaking, he flung *dablemba* after *dablemba*, in all colours of the rainbow, in front of the Mongolian. The latter sat calmly sipping his tea, with only a casual, sideways glance at the goods. Such things are not done in a hurry. The matter must be considered at leisure. At length the customer points at a particular length of cloth and asks:

“How much for that?”

"Four bricks of tea," says the Chinaman.

"*Yadsen unte.*" (Too dear.)

"Don't say that!" exclaims the Chinaman. "Anyhow, how are you going to pay and how many lengths do you want?"

"I'm paying with camel-hair."

"And how many lengths?" insists the Chinaman.

"If you'll let me have it cheap—one."

"The price is twenty pounds of camel's hair."

The Mongolian gives the shopkeeper a look, then turns his back on him, calmly observing the crowd outside. Then, over his shoulder, he flings two words at the Chinaman:

"Too dear."

The shopkeeper does not argue. He knows the ritual.

"Have another glass of tea?" he says, adding: "Well, and what do you think you'd like to pay?"

"Eight pounds."

"*Tusuge*," (impossible), "give me nineteen."

"No, but perhaps eight and a half."

"Can't be done," replies the Chinaman regretfully. "I'd be losing on it."

"Well, if it can't be done, it can't," says the Mongolian with a shrug. "Good-bye."

"Eighteen pounds!" snaps the shopkeeper.

"No." And the customer starts to leave.

"Seventeen pounds," the shopkeeper calls after him.

"No," the customer flings back.

"Sixteen pounds!"

"No, no," the Mongolian shouts back from the court-yard.

This is where the haggling begins in real earnest. The Chinaman runs out after the customer and, walking beside him, tries to "bring him round." But the Mongolian takes no notice and continues on his way.

"Fifteen pounds," says the Chinaman.

"No," replies the Mongolian, leaning against the gate-post. "Tell me your lowest price."

"Fourteen and a half pounds," says the merchant, immediately adding: "How much do you want to give?"

"Nine pounds."

The Chinaman begins to gesticulate, talking rapidly in a desperate, wailing tone:

"Please understand—I'm losing on it, losing a great deal. I can't let you have it as cheaply as that, I can't. Won't you give me fourteen?"

The Mongolian heaves himself erect and is already out in the street. He only says one word:

"No."

The Chinaman runs after him in the street, rapidly bringing down the price of the *dablemba* by half-pounds to twelve and a half, while the Mongolian keeps repeating, "No, I don't want it." He knows he is winning.

"Eleven pounds!" cries the Chinaman in desperation.

The Mongolian does not even deign to reply. The shopkeeper now demands almost angrily:

"What'll you give, then?"

"Nine and a half pounds."

There follows a sharp argument, the Chinaman swearing by all his gods that he is already incurring a

serious loss and that if the price were further reduced he would lose his head. Finally the Mongolian turns away and makes for another shop. The Chinaman stands restlessly looking after him, with an expression of uncertainty on his face. The Mongolian is already turning a corner. With sudden decision the Chinaman sprints after him.

"So you won't give any more?"

"No!"

"*Dza-avad*," (all right), says the Chinaman.

Now they return to the shop, where the selected *dablemba* is still lying apart. The Mongolian examines it, turning it this way and that, in order to make sure that it has not been changed.

"Well, where's the camel's hair?" asks the shop-keeper.

"Round the corner, on a cart."

The Chinaman sends his assistant to bring the cart into the court-yard. Meanwhile, the Mongolian is sipping another glass of tea.

"Where do you come from?" asks the Chinaman.

"From Tessingol," says the customer.

The Chinaman shakes his head.

"Hum!" he says with pretended disapproval, "they have very inferior camel's hair in that district."

"But my camel's hair," returns the Mongolian proudly, "is pure and soft."

The Mongolian's bullock-cart has now arrived in the court-yard. It is heavily loaded with camel's hair twisted into ropes of immense thickness, probably weighing about 300 *gins* (about 400 lb.).

"Will you weigh it?" says the Mongolian to the shopkeeper.

Van Ti, the assistant, brings a long stick, places one end on his own shoulder and the other on the Mongolian's. The Chinaman suspends a pair of scales from the middle of the stick and starts weighing one rope after another, noting down the weights on a piece of paper and finally adding up the figures with the aid of a counter.

"Two hundred and eighty-nine *gins*," he announces finally.

"You're lying!" bursts out the Mongolian.

"But you saw me do the weighing!"

"That's true. But you're cheating nevertheless, for it's not two hundred and eighty-nine but two hundred and ninety-five *gins*. I weighed the load very carefully at home."

"*Dza*" (right), says the shopkeeper without the least trace of embarrassment. "Van Ti, take this camel's hair to the shed."

The weighing of the entire load of camel's hair means that the Mongolian is going to indulge in a riot of shopping. Accordingly, he takes lunch with the shopkeeper, and it is not before evening that, after hours of vehement bargaining, the Mongolian's ox-cart passes out through the gate, laden with all manner of goods bartered for the camel's hair.

Both the shopkeeper and the customer are happy, each being convinced that he had got the better of the other.

XIII

BURNING TOWNS—A METHOD OF DISINFECTION

AFTER dinner I felt a strange pain on my palate and discovered that there was a swelling on it. I mentioned the matter to my Mongolian host.

“Don’t worry,” he said reassuringly. “I’ve got an *emchi* [lama physician] friend who’ll cure you.”

My host took me to the monastery, a separate, enclosed settlement outside the town, composed of a vast number of small houses and tents, with Buddha’s Temple—the largest and most ornate building—in the centre. The lama we were looking for was in, but we had to wait, for he was just then taking a class of lama students. We spent the time walking about in the court of the temple and my Mongolian friend explained that the monastery is the principal part of almost every Mongolian town. In fact, the towns are formed round the monasteries—a Mongolian noble founds a monastery in his palace, the monastery attracts lamas from all parts, and the lamas in turn attract their own relations, who build and inhabit the town proper. The last to arrive are the Chinese dealers, who come to exploit the business opportunities presented by such agglomerations. At first both the monastery and the town consist of tents, then gradually mud huts and houses are built, including the

inevitable temple. That was how Vangin came into existence.

The monasteries play an important part in Mongolia. It is here that the young men who consecrate their lives to the education and welfare of the people are trained for their task. Practically all the lama monasteries were built on the banks of rivers or on the southern slopes of mountains. Soon they became cultural centres, because the lamas, in addition to their purely religious functions, also act as physicians, astronomers and even artists. The head of the monastery is believed to be the incarnation of some great man of the past, for he is selected from among lamas whose birth was marked by some extraordinary sign or event—an indication that the new-born child was the incarnation of some great spirit. However, any Mongolian may send his son to a lama monastery to be educated and trained for the priesthood.

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Our talk was interrupted by gay childish laughter as the lama students in their coloured gowns streamed out into the court. Each child carried under his arm a long, narrow wooden box containing a sheaf of papers covered with Tibetan characters. These papers were their "school books."

My friend and I entered the physician's tent and after handing over our gift—a silk *chadak* each—we sat down on two flat cushions lying on the floor and

waited. The lama immediately began to speak to my companion, wanting to know how business was, how the hunting was likely to go that season, and whether the medicine he had given him was proving effective, adding that if my host required more he could have it.

"No, thanks," said my host. "I don't need any more, but my friend here wishes to consult you."

The lama asked me what the trouble was, then he took my pulse and examined my palate.

"Don't worry," he said at length, "it'll be gone in three or four days. I'll give you nine powders. The first three will be very bitter, the second three less unpleasant, and the final three quite good."

Taking a large leather bag from a drawer he untied it. It was crammed with tiny silk and leather bags bearing linen labels inscribed in Tibetan. As he opened the large bag the tent was pervaded with a peculiar sickly smell. The lama in a few seconds selected the required medicine and, transferring a quantity into some powder papers, handed these to me.

"The three large ones," he explained, "must be boiled in water and it is the liquor that you have to drink after straining it. The other six you simply swallow."

I thanked him and gave him three silver coins. The lama turned them over curiously, then thanked me by nodding his head.

I confess I had no great faith in the lama's medicine. Nevertheless, I decided to give it a trial and carried

out the lama's instructions to the letter. And four days later I was completely cured.

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The lama doctors—or *emchis*, as they are called—had a monopoly of medicine in Mongolia for centuries and it was only recently that the first European-trained Mongolian doctors returned to their native land. Even to-day medicine in the greater part of this vast country is in the hands of the lamas, as the scientifically trained doctors are naturally few in number.

However, the lamas know nothing about the treatment of skin and venereal diseases, explaining their ignorance by the alleged fact that the ancient scientific books dealing with such diseases have been lost. Yet one of the most widespread diseases in Mongolia is syphilis. This is not surprising, as boys reach their “majority” from the sexual point of view between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, and girls even earlier, so that, with their universal ignorance of hygiene, as well as of the symptoms of the dread disease, there is nothing to check the spread of syphilis. All the lamas do is to prescribe a solution of silver nitrate (called in Mongolian *mungusu*, from *mungo*=silver, and *usu*=water), which is applied to the sores as well as taken internally. The result is, of course, a foregone conclusion.

The medicines supplied by the lamas for the treatment of other diseases are practically all made from herbs and flowers, which are desiccated and pulverised and administered in powder form. It is a

general rule that during the treatment the patient must eat nothing but millet.

A few medicines, however, are prepared from dried bear flesh, or bear gall, while the navel gland of the musk-deer—*chabarga* in Mongolian—is also considered a most useful medicament. These medicines are also taken in powder form.

Black-pox and pulmonary consumption are frequent diseases among the Mongolians, and the lamas have no effective remedy against them.

Some *emchis* prescribe quicksilver for their patients, the method of administration being that the quicksilver is placed into a burning tobacco pipe and the patient is made to inhale the quicksilver vapour together with the tobacco smoke. Needless to say, the murderous vapour has a disastrous effect on the patient's system.

Many years ago a Swedish mission, and later two Russian missions, made attempts to combat contagious diseases in Mongolia by modern scientific methods—not entirely from altruistic motives, as the hospitals built by these missions employed a large number of Swedish and Russian doctors and nurses, in addition to which the Russians—particularly in recent years—have also used the health services for propaganda purposes.

The Mongolian Government has now established an entirely independent health service, and Urga to-day has an immense hospital with up-to-date equipment, an X-ray laboratory and a State dispensary. In this hospital the scientifically trained doctors are

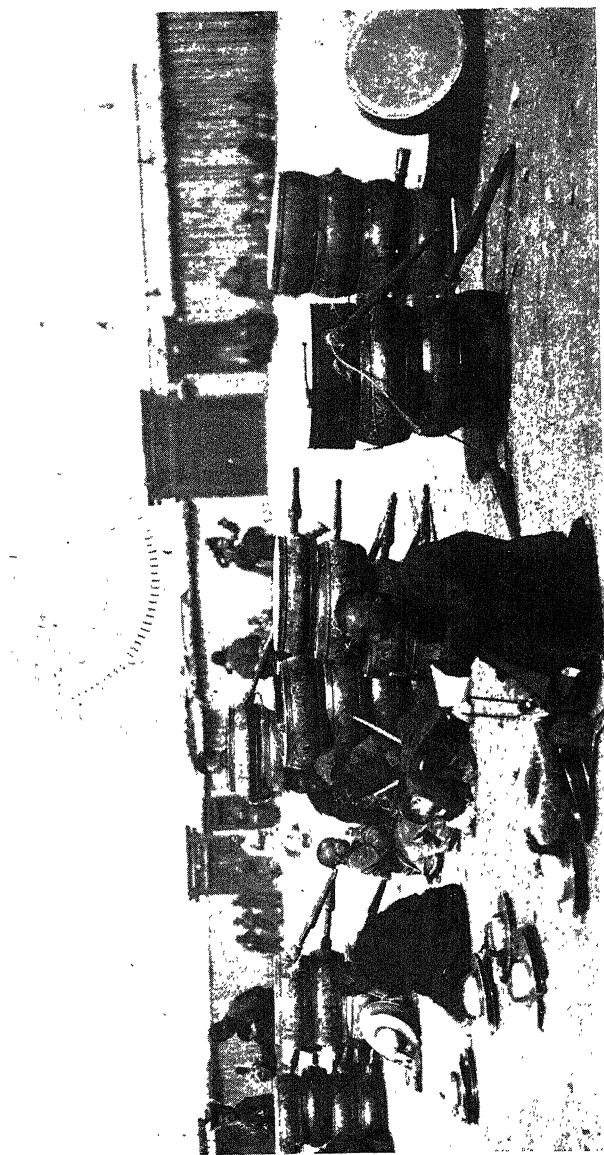
assisted by lamas who, according to their own methods, treat internal complaints, while the doctors deal with anything pertaining to surgery and obstetrics.

One of the worst scourges in Mongolia, in addition to syphilis, is pulmonary consumption—called *tarbagan-melan* in Mongolian, because its germ-carrier is the Mongolian marmot, or *tarbagan*. The Mongolians have suffered from this disease for centuries without discovering a remedy. All they are able to do is to try to prevent its spread. The usual method employed by the Government is to have the district where an outbreak occurs surrounded by military and to maintain the “siege” until the disease has passed, or until it has killed the last person in the locality. The entire district, with all it contains, is then burned to the ground.

Outbreaks of pulmonary consumption occur periodically. The latest epidemic ravaged Eastern Mongolia in 1928, when an entire district was surrounded by the military, who maintained a strict quarantine until the last of the inhabitants was dead. More than a thousand persons succumbed to the disease. And when it was all over the sky of Eastern Mongolia was for long dyed red with mighty tongues of flame as the earthly remains of the victims, together with their houses, tents and all other possessions, were slowly reduced to ashes. The caravans even to-day avoid the scene of the catastrophe, where blackened human bones lie scattered among gaunt ruins.



RESTING LAMAS DURING MAIDERI FESTIVAL



SACRED DRUMS, DEPOSITED DURING REST PAUSE IN MAIDERI PROCESSION

XIV

THE "CAM" FESTIVAL

A BRILLIANT August day, with a sky of dazzling blue and not a trace of cloud anywhere. The streets of Vangin-Chure are thronged with people dressed in brilliant colours, with heavily embroidered hats and silver-trimmed head-dresses. The town is preparing for the Cam, one of the greatest religious and popular festivals, and the faithful—plain cattlemen as well as Mongolians of the wealthier classes—have come from great distances to witness the religious ceremony and participate in the subsequent merry-making. The colossal banners have been brought out of the temple. The gold-and-silver-embroidered heavy silk is waving and billowing in the breeze.

At the end of the square in front of the temple there is a hundred-foot-high bamboo scaffolding, from which is hung a silk square of staggering dimensions embroidered with the image of Buddha and his disciples. In front of the monastery there are richly decorated tents, in which the pilgrims are to forgather. The square is already filled with a curious crowd, while in the town the shops are crammed with people buying dried fruit and tea to take with them to the scene of the festival, for the Cam lasts from morning till sunset and the people take provisions with them, in order to be

able to stay till the end. To-day, the eve of Cam, the square is being swept clean of pebbles, stones and refuse, and two young lamas are drawing circles and squares on the ground with diluted lime. My host is also busy preparing provisions for the morrow.

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The great day, the day of Cam, has arrived. A number of lamas in yellow silk robes have already forgathered in the square. They constitute the orchestra, with brightly polished wind instruments, trumpets, drums and tambourines. Through the fence of the monastery an excited throng, dressed in multi-coloured silks, is watching the proceedings; not far from the edge of the crowd stand the horses, with silver wrought saddles upholstered in red. It is a dazzling scene of colour, brilliance and movement, rendered all the more glittering by the crystal-clear Mongolian atmosphere.

The procession now begins to emerge through the monastery gate, headed by the young lama students carrying silk flags and sacred objects. The flags are of peculiar shapes, some of them resembling lampshades. Each flag bears a magic phrase inscribed in Tibetan characters, in addition to the glittering, gold-embroidered sacred formula for keeping away evil spirits: "*Om mani pade hum.*" Whenever these flags flutter in the breeze they are "praying" in place of the lamas.

There are ordinary flags as well, some of which have in distant centuries fluttered across Europe in

the hands of victorious Mongolian warriors.

The lama students are followed by lamas bearing sacred banners from the temple, and behind them walk, in single file, eight young lamas, each pair carrying on their shoulders a gigantic brass trumpet—perhaps fifteen feet long—blown every now and then by a lama of high rank. The colossal instruments are followed by another band, and as they emerge from the temple the square becomes filled with an ear-splitting, crashing medley of noise, composed of the screech of wind instruments, the rolling of drums, the crash of cymbals and the weird bellowing of the gigantic trumpets.

Next to emerge from the temple is a group of lamas in weird masks, representing lions, tigers, elephants with long trunks and gleaming white tusks, grinning monsters that resemble no known creature, or stags with real antlers. All the masks are three or four feet high and correspondingly heavy, and as the "monsters" come dancing out into the merciless sun they extract coloured kerchiefs from the folds of their robes and wipe their perspiring faces under the masks.

The monsters are followed by a gigantic lion, probably made of wood, with the chief lama sitting on its back in glittering robes, with a tall hat decorated with precious stones. Then comes a figure apparently sitting in a boat that floats on invisible water—a lama with a canvas boat fastened round his middle. The boatman is followed by a lama in a mask with a long horn projecting from its forehead and a long, white

beard that sweeps the ground. The procession is closed by a group of lamas of the highest rank wearing large helmets and walking with bowed heads, praying now softly, now loudly, their voices almost lost in the continuous, chaotic noise of the music.

A few young lamas now dash forward, and with great haste spread out some carpets in the middle of the square and place cushions in front of the tents. The lamas make themselves comfortable on the cushions, the orchestra take up their positions, and the masked actors come hopping and dancing to the middle of the square.

The music continues in full blast while the actors reach the carpets. There they stop, and two of them, the bearded monster and a black figure representing the devil, detach themselves from the group. The old man starts running about, turning somersaults, ducking and skipping, pursued by the "devil," who reaches out for him as though trying to capture him. This peculiar game continues for several minutes, after which the old man dashes back to the carpets and tries to sit down. The "devil" bounds after him, and with a swift movement snatches the carpet away from under him.

The spectators burst into delighted laughter, while the old man scratches his mask and tears his beard in anger. Then he flings himself upon the "devil," but the latter jumps away. Meanwhile, the young lamas have replaced the carpet and the game is played over once more, the spectators rewarding the players with stormy applause. Finally the old man succeeds in

outwitting the “devil” and sitting down firmly on the carpet. He looks round triumphantly and the crowd duly applauds, somewhat like a football crowd after the first goal.

Such are the games with which the lamas amuse themselves and their public at the Cam festival. In between these performances there are dance numbers, which the masked lamas perform, to the accompaniment of the ear-splitting music, with a lightness and at a pace that are all the more amazing as the weight of their masks must be a very considerable handicap.

All this happens in the scorching sun, with players and spectators alike covered in perspiration, but they all hold out until the evening, when the procession of the lamas is re-formed and, accompanied by the sounds of the weird orchestra, which now includes drums made of human skin, returns to the temple. That marks the end of the festival and the crowd slowly disperses.

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There are many monasteries in Mongolia, as nearly a third of the total male population lives in monasteries. The Cam festival is celebrated everywhere, but the most famous Cam is held at Dzun-Chure, the monastery of Urga, which is visited by Buddhists from the most distant corners of the country. Rehearsals begin weeks before the festival and the lamas practise their respective rôles with great zeal, so that everything should go smoothly on the great day.

The Cam festival is not entirely Buddhist; it includes

much that has been handed down from the Shamanite religion, for many of the various masked players represent evil spirits which are finally overcome by benevolent spirits. On the other hand, the Cam is also a theatrical or circus performance, given by the lamas for their own and the people's amusement.

The pantomimes presented by the lamas are not always traditional but are made up from time to time by the lamas themselves. There are many solemn consultations and meetings at the monasteries a long time before the festival as to the pantomimes, jokes, and "gags" to be passed for the Cam.

A RIDE TO TESSINGOL

THE time came when I felt that I must make an end of my Vangin-Chure visit and continue on my homeward journey. Accordingly, I approached Saltukov, a superintendent of the "Centrosoius"—the Russian buying agency—who had come from Tessingol to Vangin-Chure for the Cam festival. The "Centrosoius" was organised during the war by the Russians with a view to buying provisions in Mongolia for the Russian army. Saltukov received me with great friendliness, but regretted that he could not offer me a seat in his carriage, as he had already promised the only available seat to a man named Kanyin, who was postmaster at Tessingol. I therefore called on Kanyin, thinking that he might be able to advise me.

Kanyin informed me that he had bought two horses and a small cart at Vangin and after a great deal of talk he agreed to let me drive the team to Tessingol. This was no great favour on Kanyin's part, for if I had not approached him he would have been obliged to hire someone to drive his purchase home. However, it was a way of going ahead, and I was satisfied.

The following day we set off, Saltukov and Kanyin riding in a comfortable upholstered four-wheeler,

and myself in a two-wheeled cart, which shook me so badly that I had to be careful not to bite my tongue. When we arrived in Tessingol that evening my body was one unspeakable ache.

Early the next morning Kanyin awakened me from a dreamless sleep with the offer of a case of tea bricks if I agreed to repair the telegraph line. The line was of extreme importance as the only link with Russia, and some time later I learned that Kanyin had charged the Russian authorities two cases of tea bricks for my work. However, at that moment one case of tea bricks was to me also something in the nature of a fortune, and I accepted Kanyin's offer before I knew what I had to do. He placed at my disposal a cart with two horses, a guide, two coils of wire, some insulators, a Winchester rifle with ammunition, and half a sackful of dried bread.

We drove along the telegraph line looking for the breach, and finally found it at a point where a pole had been struck by lightning. An hour later the defect was repaired and we could return to Tessingol.

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Mongolia has but few telegraph lines; the one I repaired had been constructed by the Russians many years earlier. The first telegraph line, however, was constructed by the Chinese between Urga and Peking. The Danish Telegraph Company's line runs parallel with the former for part of the Copenhagen-Paris-Peking-Shanghai service. A third telegraph line was later constructed by the Mongolian Government

along this route between Urga and Ude.

One of the two Russian lines runs between Troiskosavsk and Urga, while the other connects Murin-Tessingol-Uliasutai; it was the latter line that I repaired for Kanyin.

The Mongolian National Government has since expropriated all the lines, except that belonging to the Danes, the administration of which has been taken over without interfering with proprietary rights.

* * * *

It was almost evening by the time I completed the repairs, and as it was a clear, warm evening we decided to camp out instead of returning to Tessingol. Accordingly, we tethered the horses to some trees, cooked a bustard I had shot earlier in the day, and after supper composed ourselves to sleep on the grass. With the harness for my pillow and a sheet of canvas for covering, I fell asleep in a few minutes.

Towards dawn I awoke to a stinging pain, which felt like a thousand simultaneous pin-pricks all over my body, and realised that there was a bitterly cold wind blowing. I wrapped the canvas sheet closer round my body, but it was all in vain. Further sleep in the biting cold was impossible, so I rose—and found that the country all around was clothed in white. It had snowed while I slept, though it was the beginning of August, and the previous day had been so hot that I was hardly able to bear it. Subsequent experience taught me that there was nothing surprising in this; the nights in certain parts of Mongolia are

bitterly cold, while the days are scorching hot. In fact, shortly after sunrise on that particular day all trace of frost and snow had disappeared and the sun was beating down on us as we drove home with the same merciless intensity as the previous day.

This was my first electrical job in Mongolia, and I was extremely proud of it. Back at the telegraph office I received my wages—a case of tea bricks—and a highly gratifying piece of news. It appeared that a Russian merchant named Bobrov was starting for Uliasutai by carriage within a few days, and that I might be allowed to travel with him.

* * * *

I heaved a sigh of relief and satisfaction as we—Bobrov and I—drove away from Kanyin's house. We both carried rifles, though not as a protection against the Reds, for at that time there were no Reds in this part of the world, in spite of the heroic tales told by some people about encounters with Reds who, of course, either fled or fell dead as soon as the teller of the tale fired his revolver. No, we carried our rifles not from fear of the Reds that were not there, but because the country through which we were travelling was chock-a-block with *zerin*—the Mongolian antelope. A peculiar characteristic of the *zerin* is their extraordinary curiosity. If they see a carriage or a car they rush towards it or run after it for miles, though they take hardly any notice of a horseman and merely look up for a moment when a rider passes before them.

XVI

DAINGEROUS FUR-HUNTING

WHEN our carriage was within sight of the *zerin* we got out and lay in wait behind a low mound of earth. The *zerin* gathered round the carriage, staring at it and smelling it. The poor creatures did not realise, even while we were shooting them, what was happening, and most of them remained standing, as though rooted to the spot, except for an excited movement of their heads.

Bobrov shot a few of the animals, but I merely watched the strange hunt.

On the third day, however, I made good use of my rifle by shooting a bustard. This, too, is a peculiar sport. The Mongolians nearly always ride on horse-back and never hurt birds, so the birds are not afraid of them. Pedestrians, on the other hand, seem to frighten them, for at sight of anybody walking the birds immediately take to their wings. While a horse or a carriage is in motion the bustards calmly continue to search for insects on the ground, but the moment they stop the birds are up in a flash. It is not difficult to outwit them, when one knows their peculiarities.

As our carriage was passing a group of bustards I quietly slid down on the far side and lay flat on the ground, while the carriage passed on. The birds took

no notice, and with a single shot I succeeded in hitting a splendid specimen that was later found to weigh nearly 35 lb. Picking up the dead bird I ran after the carriage and climbed into my seat.

Bobrov now began to talk about the Mongolian hunters, remarking that their hunting was neither so safe nor so simple as my recent effort. It appears that the Mongolians go into the mountains in bitterly cold wintry weather to shoot the rarer species of fur animals, selling the skins to Russian and Chinese traders or using them for themselves and their families. A considerable portion of the Mongolian population engage in hunting in addition to cattle-breeding. Formerly, before the Chinese began to exploit them, there were far fewer hunters among the Mongolians, but in recent years necessity has driven an increasing number of people to augment their income by hunting.

The hunter has a great variety of wild animals to choose from—marmot, Siberian grey squirrel, Mongolian fox, wild cat, brown and grey bear, deer, reindeer, etc. The stag must be caught alive, as it is only hunted for the sake of the antlers, which must be sawn off the living animal, in order to be of use for the preparation of the stimulant referred to in an earlier chapter. There are two methods of catching the stag. One is to drive it into deep snow and lasso it, while the other method consists in luring the animal into a wedge-shaped pen. One side of the pen is left open and, starting at a considerable distance from the opening, the ground is sprinkled with salt.

The animals trap themselves by walking into the pen as they lick up the salt. When the stags are well inside the pen the hunters dash out from their hiding-place and quickly close the opening.

It was for such pens that the Saiodes stole the wire from the telegraph poles near the Russian frontier.

But in addition to the animals already mentioned there are numerous rare animals living in the Mongolian forests and mountains, such as musk-deer, mink, stoat, weasel, wild boar. Naturally, hunting does not proceed throughout the year. Winter animals are hunted from October till December, partly because, later, their skins become thinner and are useless for fur, but also because the females are then pregnant. Wild boar and musk-deer are generally trapped, while wolf and fox are killed with food poisoned with strychnine.

The furs exported by Mongolia are mainly squirrel, marmot, Mongolian fox and wolf, while the fur of other animals is used by the hunters themselves, so that it is no rarity to see a simple Mongolian hunter or cattleman wearing a mink cap or a musquash coat.

The guns used by the hunters are, in the majority of cases, blunderbusses of the most primitive kind, entirely made by the hunters themselves, except for the barrel, which they purchase mostly from the Russians. They also make their own gunpowder, and the hunter for weeks and months, in the most appalling cold, carries on his back not only the heavy blunderbuss, but also enormous quantities of powder and shot, jumping with his load from rock to rock, or

dragging himself along in knee-deep snow, or skating across frozen brooks, perhaps on the very edge of a precipice.

The hunters are badly exploited by the foreign traders, who force them to sell the skins at throw-away prices, in order to increase their own already large profits. However, the Mongolian hunter carries on in the hope that, in the end, he will be able to buy a few head of cattle with the proceeds of his hunting, thus providing a living for the wife and children awaiting his return in a tent on the steppe. A few head of cattle and a quiet life wandering about on the Mongolian plains—that is the Mongolian hunter's dream, for the realisation of which he does not hesitate to risk his life in the snow and ice of the mountains.

At present, however, the Mongolian Government is already running a fur co-operative, the object of which is to prevent exploitation of the hunters by foreign traders, so that the hunters have now ceased to be entirely in the hands of grasping business men.

XVII

CANINE THIEF-CATCHERS, LIVING REFUSE CARTS

AT one point in our journey we decided to take a short rest and unharnessing the horses we turned them out to graze. We could see in the distance the outlines of two carts and when, after a time, they reached us we made the acquaintance of the owners, two Russian refugees who had been trading in Mongolia for years and were now taking various goods eastward. We soon made friends with them and with their cheery Mongolian servant Gombo. We lay down on the grass and talked, while Gombo, with one of the horses, was sent ahead to find a Mongolian encampment where we could spend the night.

In less than half an hour Gombo, with a wide grin on his face, came riding back, accompanied by another Mongolian, and reported that there was an encampment surrounded by excellent pasture at a short distance from where we were, and that the tent-dwellers were already preparing the best of good "eats" against our arrival. That evening the hospitable tent-dwellers gave a mighty banquet in our honour.

* * * *

In the morning we pushed on. The horses went at a slow trot over hills and dales, across brooks and

rivulets, the soft, dusty road absorbing the noise of the wheels and the sound of the horses' hooves. The sun rose higher and higher, and the heat, combined with the rocking motion of the cart, sent me to sleep. I was awakened by a terrific rain-storm. In Mongolia it does not rain often, but when it does it rains "cats and dogs." We were wet to the skin within a few minutes, the water was rushing down in torrents from the surrounding hills, and the Buengol river, which lay in our path, became so swollen that we were only just able to cross it. The trouble was that the Buengol had many twists and turns and the crossing had to be repeated several times. Meanwhile the cloudburst continued, and my Russian fellow-travellers' load of goods was beginning to fall to pieces, in addition to which the water absorbed by the goods made them so heavy that the horses were hardly able to pull the carts.

However, even through the watery veil of the rain we could discern the outlines of Uliasutai and all our depression vanished in a moment. To complete our happiness the rain suddenly stopped and the sun smiled once more over the soaked landscape. On the outskirts of the city we parted from the two Russians, and Bobrov and I drove on to the house of Silov, Bobrov's partner, where we began to unload the 65 pound sacks of Russian silver coins.

Bobrov and Silov withdrew to their office to discuss their business affairs, while I went round the house inquiring of the employees after the whereabouts of Burdukov, Beziazikov's debtor, to whom



DRUM CART OF MAIDERI PROCESSION



PERFORMERS AT CAM FESTIVAL



A LAMA STUDENT



A WANDERING LAMA

the latter, at Belozarsk, had given me a letter of introduction, with a request that he should pay part of the debt to me. Bobrov's employees told me that Burdukov was not then in Uliasutai.

"Besides," said the cook, also a Russian refugee, "it'd do you no good if you went to him. These rich Russians don't worry much about poor people. Take our master, Silov. He treats us like dogs, although he knows that we are Russian refugees like himself, except that we haven't done anything shady. I was better off in Russia than he, but here in Mongolia he had no difficulty in being more unscrupulous than I, so I'm his servant. There are many Russians like him who came here without a kopek, and made a fortune by defrauding the Mongolians and the Chinese."

The cook went on to tell me a story of murderous treachery on the part of the White Russians. It appears that when Dja Lama's hordes came to Uliasutai the Chinese merchants took refuge from the rage of the Mongolians with the Russians, taking all their worldly possessions with them. The Russians concealed everything well—including the Chinese—but when the Mongolians came to search their houses the Russians received them with smiling faces and obsequious words, for once genuinely prepared to "serve" the Mongolians.

"*Kitat inde beina?*" (Any Chinese here?), was the Mongolians' stereotyped question. The Chinese merchants in the cellars and other hiding-places heard it with terror, well knowing that if discovered the

Mongolians, who were in the habit of blaming the Chinese for all their ills and misfortunes, would surely put them to the sword. And the kind, hospitable Russians made sure that their guests were discovered. Doors were battered down and the hospitality of the "White" Russians was consummated amid the shrieks and death-rattle of the Chinese who had entrusted their lives to them. Naturally, the Russians in betraying their Chinese guests took great care not to reveal to the Mongolians the hiding-place of the victims' goods and money, which they appropriated for themselves. The orgy of murder and looting went on for months, until nearly everything the unfortunate Chinese merchants possessed passed into Russian hands.

The White Russians now proceeded to despoil the Mongolians. The method was simple. They threw the Chinese goods on the market, offering everything on credit. Now, credit terms in Mongolia are appalling beyond European conception, as goods are sold for "cattle equivalents," not cash, and it is an accepted rule that the credit purchaser must pay the seller not only the original price of the article bought—for instance, a sheep—but all the descendants of that sheep born between the date of the bargain and the date of payment. That was why the White Russians offered the stolen goods on credit—two or three years' credit if possible, so that they could collect from the simple-minded Mongolians several animals for every one that was due to them.

They had no fear of bad debts, for the Mongolian

pays his debts at all costs, partly from inherent honesty and partly from terror of the debtors' prison, which is still flourishing in Mongolia, and where defaulting debtors are confined again and again until their debts are paid in full. That was how the White Russians exploited the country that gave them sanctuary.

The cook, a Russian ex-officer, was beside himself as he told me the story, remarking in conclusion:

"And these are the people you expect assistance from!"

* * * *

When Silov had finished his conversation with Bobrov he came out to the kitchen and, pointing to me, asked the cook:

"Who's that?" Then he added: "Probably another Russian refugee—they never leave you in peace."

However, Bobrov had also come out and I was saved from further humiliation by his energetic intervention.

"Shut up!" he said. "Haven't I introduced him to you? Anyhow, he's going on to Urga."

Some time after my visit, when the Mongolians attacked the Chinese again, they massacred not only the latter but also the White Russians, who were then awaiting Baron Ungern-Sternberg—who passed through Mongolia killing and pillaging—as their saviour. It was then that Silov lost his life.

I almost fled from Silov's house and began to wander through the night in the streets of Uliasutai. Suddenly I was surrounded by wildly barking dogs

coming from all directions, and only escaped serious injury by picking up stones from the ground and bombarding the dogs as rapidly as I could while slowly retreating towards Silov's house. I found Silov excitedly running about in search of a lantern—he had heard the barking of the dogs and was about to go in search of me.

Bobrov then explained that there were many stray dogs in every Mongolian town. They act as scavengers and the Mongolians are glad to feed them on that account. There are no lavatories, and the dogs are the only means of keeping the streets clean from human and animal excreta.

The dogs also perform another important function by "policing" the streets at night. They never attack a pedestrian carrying a lantern—and all honest people carry lanterns at night. It is only thieves who walk in the dark without a light and the dogs invariably attack them, thereby driving them into the arms of the law.

"You had no lantern," remarked Bobrov, "that was why the dogs went for you. You might have thought that these animals ought to be exterminated. If so, you would have been wrong. This is an entirely different world from yours, with different institutions, different points of view, and, as you see, it doesn't do to judge hastily."

XVIII

A CHINESE FORTRESS

BOBROV found me lodgings at a Russian smithy, as Silov refused to have me in his house. Bobrov told me that I would have to visit the Russian consul, Sergei Petrovitch, on the morrow, as it was necessary for me to obtain a Chinese passport in order to be allowed to go to Urga, and the Chinese only issued passports on the Russian consul's recommendation.

The following morning I called on Sergei Petrovitch, a former Cossack officer, who acted in Uliasutai as agent of the Russian Government. Petrovitch was very friendly and gave me a note to take to the Chinese political commissar at the Yamoen. The Yamoen was an old Chinese fortress on the edge of the city. The entrance was guarded by a few Chinese soldiers in grey uniforms, who immediately allowed me to pass through to the commissar's office upon production of Petrovitch's note. The commissar read the note and gave me a Chinese passport without further ado.

I was so glad I could hardly contain myself—I was now free to go to Urga and thence—home. The Chinese wished me *bon voyage* and were uncommonly friendly, a fact that I duly appreciated but did not quite understand. It was only later, when I was

in Urga, that a Chinese military judge enlightened me. It appears that the Chinese considered that they had been cheated by the Allied Powers and were therefore anxious to show kindness to nationals of the Central Powers. So the friendliness I experienced at the hands of the Chinese of Uliasutai had a political background.

After leaving the commissar's office I had a good look at the fortress, an ancient affair built of clay on the plain in the immediate vicinity of Uliasutai. The fortress from the outside, with its grey walls, its four tall watch-towers and the gaping gun-holes in the latter and along the walls, made a gloomy, depressing picture. But within the fortress there was a whole city, with ornate houses, gardens, temples, and even a theatre, although when I was there nearly every one of the buildings showed traces of the then recent bombardments of the fortress. Many roofs were caved in and houses with part of a wall missing could be seen in all directions. In the case of a number of these buildings the rooms were completely exposed, so that the interior wall paintings of warriors with terrible faces, with mighty swords and richly-embroidered robes, or of white-bearded gods and snarling Chinese dragons, were easily visible from the street.

From the fortress I went straight back to Sergei Petrovitch and with an outsize smile on my face thanked him for his intervention. Then I returned to Silov's house and reported to my good friend Bobrov the success of my mission. Bobrov told me with evident pleasure that he had met a Russian

who came from Urga and was soon returning there with a bullock caravan. The Russian needed an assistant and would probably engage me.

The following day was the day of the Chinese autumn festival. The Chinese quarter was full of merriment and jubilation, with religious processions from morning till night. In the afternoon the procession entered the temple court, which was decorated with silk flags for the occasion. The part of the temple facing the court had a sort of balcony decorated with gold mouldings which served as a stage and on which Chinese actors performed religious and historical scenes for the entertainment of the populace.

After the performance the procession resumed its journey, headed by priests bearing sacred vessels and a sacred black horse walking under a gold-embroidered canopy between grooms dressed in red, yellow and blue. The canopy was carried by ten powerful Chinamen. It was followed by another canopy, beneath which sat a dignified idol.

In the evening the procession was more magnificent still. The lanterns of the priests and the people threw an eerie light on the forest of flags carried by the procession and shimmered dully on the gold of the sacred vessels and the idols. The lanterns were made of the outer leaves of cabbages, with candles in the centre, and gave a ghostly green light which fitted in with the monotonous music and the murmured prayers of members of the procession.

THE NEW MONGOLIA

I went to bed that night tired out and dazed by the spectacles of the day, yet I could hardly await the morning, which was the time of my appointment with the owner of the bullock caravan.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MOUNTAINS

BOBROV introduced me to my new fellow-traveller and employer, a former Cossack officer who, during the Tsarist regime, had been attached to the Russian consulate at Urga, but was now a carrier. We made our bargain quickly and shook hands on it. Bobrov gave me some money with which to buy provisions for the journey, so I went off to do my shopping while the caravan was being loaded on the edge of the town. After a hasty round in the town I called on Bobrov to say good-bye, which I did with considerable emotion, for it was Bobrov's kindness and humanity that enabled me to carry on. When I returned to the caravan the carts were already loaded with sheep's wool, and I was only just in time to assist in covering them with horse-hides and in in-spanning the bullocks.

This was the first time that I had a close view of a Mongolian bullock caravan. There were 74 animals in "single file," each bearing on its neck the yoke of a two-wheeled Mongolian cart, or *terghe*. The *terghe* is a grand invention—two shafts with a few transverse laths at the rear end and a pair of wheels fixed to an axle. The rear part of the shaft arrangement rests on the axle by a hollowed-out block fixed underneath each shaft.

Thus the rear part of the shafts constitutes the body of the cart, while the front part is the shaft proper, with a fixed yoke which is fastened underneath the bullock's throat with string. A transverse board behind the bullock provides a seat for the driver, who guides the bullock with the aid of string reins looped round the animal's horns. With this primitive vehicle the Mongolians travel thousands of miles and transport countless tons of goods.

As the bullocks are in-spanned they are secured to the rear of the cart in front, "trains" of from ten to twenty carts being connected in this way in charge of a single driver. The bullock of the leading cart is invariably an experienced animal which appears to be conscious of the importance of its "office." It requires no guidance from the driver, who often falls asleep in his seat, trusting the bullock to find the right path over hills and dales or marshy ground. It depends on the leading bullock whether the caravan travels fast or slowly, and it is only necessary to outspan him in order to "anchor" the caravan.

* * * *

"Gee up!" we shout and the caravan starts.

Vladimirov, the owner of the caravan, points to the Tarbagatai group of the mighty Hangai range of mountains that loom ahead of us.

"That's what we have to cross," he says. "A nice job, what? 5,700 feet from the foot of the mountain—and that's a few thousand feet above sea-level."

Vladimirov was right. On the plain we got along swimmingly, but as soon as we reached the slope the caravan got stuck.

"It froze during the night," growled Agfan, one of the Mongolian drivers, "that's why the path is so slippery."

The bullocks strained themselves in vain—for every foot they advanced they slipped back two, and in the end we were obliged to break up the various trains and take each *terghe* separately up the mountain, the bullock pulling and we drivers pushing from behind. Of course, every now and then either a bullock or a man slipped and rolled in the slush. It was late night by the time the last cart reached the top of the mountain.

We had travelled a total of three miles that day, and we were glad to pitch camp and set about preparing our supper. I acted as cook, while the three Mongolian drivers, respectively Taichi, Puncuch and Agfan by name, pottered about the cauldron breathing heavily.

Agfan was the most typical of the three Mongolians, a giant of a lad with high cheek-bones and gleaming white teeth. He was the only one I had talked with that day, and this was his first opportunity of introducing me to his fellows. Agfan did not bother to learn my real name, but—as is the Mongolian custom in the case of Europeans whose names are difficult for them to pronounce—gave me a new name based on what he regarded as the most conspicuous feature in my physical appearance—my newly grown beard.

Accordingly he introduced me to his friends as "*Sinne Sachal*" or "Newbeard." The Mongolians called me *Sinne Sachal* for the rest of the journey.

During supper I learned that Taichi belonged to the nobility and was a retainer of Dunche Dun (Duke Dunche). Fifteen bullocks of the caravan belonged to him and he had bought from Vladimirov the loads they were carrying. Puncuch was a friend of his, both came from the Tamir-Gol district. Taichi was small and looked like a Hungarian peasant of the Great Plains, while Puncuch was tall and thin, with long arms and short legs, and so typically Mongolian that he could hardly walk. When standing on the ground he always seemed to be searching for a safe foothold.

After supper I went with Vladimirov for a stroll on the mountain-top. Visibility in the bluish moonlight was good and in the course of our walk we came upon a huge mound of stones with sticks pinned into it. The sticks bore *chadaks*, pieces of coloured silk, hats, top-boots, ribbons.

"This is an '*obo*'," remarked Vladimirov. He went on to explain that an *obo* is a sort of wayside altar, on which the caravans leave offerings of the kind we had seen, in order to propitiate the spirits of the mountains. The *obo* is a relic of the Shaman religion. There are travellers who merely contribute a stone to the mound, while others leave a *chadak* or a garment. In some cases Mongolian travellers, terrified of the dangers of the road, carry a vast stone money-box to the *obo*, into which subsequent passers-by throw coins. The *obo*

is then visited by the lamas of the neighbouring monasteries, who empty the money-box.

* * * *

In the morning we continued our journey, downhill this time. It was an appalling experience. The mountain path was narrow, so narrow that there was barely room for a single cart, with a sheer drop on the right and a wall of rock rising to the sky on the left. The Mongolians were content to leave everything to the instinct of the bullocks, but for once this turned out to be an imprudent plan. Two of the bullocks slipped and fell, dragging with them not only their own carts but also the entire train linked with them. Luckily, the connecting strings snapped, so that the train did not tumble off the path to destruction. But there was an unholy mix-up, with men shouting and swearing and bullocks lowing in terror as the yoke strings tautened round their necks. When we cut the strings either the bullock or the cart, or both, rolled down the slope.

It took us several hours to collect the scattered caravan and replace the broken reins with rope we had in reserve. When we finally resumed our journey Vladimirov remarked ironically:

“Perhaps we were wrong, after all, not to make a sacrifice to the spirit of the mountain. The old chap seems to be annoyed with us.”

“So he is,” replied Agfan. “If you think our troubles are over you’re mistaken. Look at that”—

pointing to the sky—"there's a snow-storm on the way."

There were dark grey clouds chasing one another above the grim peaks, and soon the last patch of blue sky was blotted out.

"If it snows," said Vladimirov, "we can't go on."

"Well," declared Agfan, "it's going to."

And Agfan proved to be a true weather prophet. The spirit of the mountain seemed to have a proper "down" on us, for almost immediately it began to snow and we were obliged to pitch camp where we stood. We restarted the caravan the next morning, but after a few miles there was another snow-storm, and for the succeeding fortnight we were to be in and out of snow-storms practically every day.

We had reached the *Shar Ussu* (Yellow Water), a river flowing in a valley between the mountains. I noticed with keen interest that the valley was covered with hundreds of carved stone pillars and what appeared to be ancient tombs. Vladimirov was unable to give me any information about them, nor did he appear to be interested. Agfan, on the other hand, seemed to know something about these vast memorials.

"They are the tombs," he said, "of a race that lived in our country a long time ago, and whom we conquered. It's a good thing there are such heavy stones on them, for otherwise their spirits would come out and make trouble for us. I hope you're not going to disturb the tombs."

THE LAND OF THE EAGLE

I WALKED about alone among the tombs, thinking that Agfan's explanation was probably correct and that the tombs held the bones of a race crushed by Djenghis Khan's victorious armies. This was confirmed to me later at Urga, where I was told by educated Mongolians that the carved memorials on the banks of the *Shar Ussu* river were raised in the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, when the territory was inhabited by the *Uigur* race. Their conquerors—the Mongols under Djenghis Khan—acquired their art and culture, hence the many similarities between the Mongolian and Hungarian languages—for the *Uigurs* were evidently related to the Huns and Magyars.

The memorial columns were about 10 feet high and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, and nearly all of them had an identical design carved in relief at the top—a sun enclosed in a crescent moon, with three sheaves of fire. Below this, the whole column was covered with a stylised image of the heron. Some of the columns showed traces of paint, red on the raised portions of the carved designs and black in the depressions.

There was also on the bank of the river a large oblong covered with stones, with four small mounds

at the corners and a big pile of stones in the centre, probably marking a common grave. The oblong covers an area of about 600 feet by 300 and—as I later learned—is of earlier origin than the columns, probably of the sixth century.

Some time after my visit a Russian scientific expedition carried out excavations in the valley of the *Shar Ussu*, unearthing from under the mounds ancient jewellery, statues, harness and other treasures, which were said to have belonged to a very ancient Tartar tribe.

Similar discoveries have been made in other parts of Mongolia. For instance, a Russian named Bolotov who, before the great war, was prospecting for gold in the region of Urga in the gold-field of Cuzukte, came upon a large block of stone at a depth of about 30 feet. Upon removing the stone he found that it covered the entrance of a large cavity, the walls and floor of which were lined with logs of red pine. There were two chambers, one large and one small, the former of which contained the bodies of a man and two women in such a good state of preservation that it was possible to determine the colour of their hair. The smaller chamber was crammed with treasures, including a gilt chariot and gold vessels and statuettes.

Part of this find was sent to the museum at Petrograd, while another part was added to the collection of the *Bogdo Gegen*. Bolotov himself is believed to have retained some of the heavier gold objects for the sake of the precious metal.



CEGAN KHAN,
A Direct Descendant of Djenghis Khan



A MONGOLIAN PARLIAMENTARY

3 DEPUTY



A LAMA BEGGAR

In subsequent years scientists at the Petrograd museum established that the tomb was that of a Hun warrior and his wives, dating from about 1000 B.C.

Needless to say, this lucky find exercised the imaginations—and the greed—of both Russians and Mongolians, with the result that the region of Urga was invaded by crowds of people feverishly searching for further Hun tombs, evidently not from any particular enthusiasm for archæology. The “gold rush” was finally stopped by the orders of the *Bogdo Gegen*.

The *Bogdo Gegen's* ban on digging operations was based on an ancient Mongolian legend. Mongolia—runs the legend—always belonged to the Mongol race. From time to time they were conquered, and the land annexed, by foreign enemies, but the Mongols reconquered their country again and again, and each time they buried their enemies deep down, so that their spirits could not escape to disturb the peace of the Mongolian people. The opening of the tombs would have released these evil spirits, with consequent danger to Mongolia, hence the *Bogdo Gegen's* ban.

However, here and there, excavations were continued in secret, mainly by Russian scientists who were prepared to take a risk for the sake of science. One of these was Professor Kozlov, leader of the expedition organised by the Russian Geographical Society. Kozlov also operated in the Cuzukte Valley, opening many Turkish-Tartar tombs and bringing to light many valuable relics and inscriptions which told the

life story—and the national history—of the occupants of the tombs.

The inscriptions, which were translated by the Russian Professor Radlov, contain valuable historical data concerning the political organisation of the Turkish tribes that lived in this territory and their wars—in the first century A.D.—with the Tartar and Mongol tribes.

According to these data the Turkish-Tartar races were replaced by the *Uigurs*—presumably the Magyars—who established a mighty empire in the centre of the present Mongolia. The Kozlov expedition discovered considerable authentic material concerning this race, which appears to have had a highly developed literature, recorded in cuneiform writing. The *Uigur* tombs were the last memorials of this kind; after them came the Mongols, whose method of burial is very different.

After the war, excavations were openly resumed by permission of the Mongolian National Government, and the work was taken in hand by the Russian Geographical Society. The Society's expedition opened a number of tombs, but found hardly anything worth preserving; the tombs had been plundered by others.

One tomb that did contain a great deal of valuable material was opened by a Russian pseudo-scientist, who simply chopped up the most precious relics for the sake of the gold they contained, then vanished with his booty.

* * * *

To return to the *Shar Ussu*, the valley through which the river flows is at the foot of the snow-covered *Bogdo-Ul* (Holy Mountain), which is 10,000 feet high and the tallest peak of the Hangai Range. According to popular belief, the top of *Bogdo-Ul* is covered, under the snow, with huge nuggets of gold. Vladimirov seemed to know a great deal about this.

"An English traveller," he told me, "heard about the legend and came here to see for himself. That was before the war, when there was a death penalty for setting foot on *Bogdo-Ul*, unless one had special permission from one of the High Priests. Well, one night the Englishman started to climb the mountain. The members of a passing caravan saw him in the moonlight, but dared not follow for fear of the consequences. One man galloped off to the nearest monastery, in order to ask the lamas' advice what to do if they should catch the sacrilegious stranger when he descended from the mountain.

"Meanwhile the Englishman kept on climbing higher and higher, stumbling every now and then, and dislodging pieces of rock which went thundering down the slope, but doggedly continuing on his way.

"Suddenly a column as of white steam shot up from the snow-cap covering the peak of *Bogdo-Ul*. The mass of snow slowly began to slide downwards; then, gathering speed, it rolled down the slope with a dull, rumbling crash, collecting more snow and boulders as it went. There was a nerve-shattering cry in the night, then silence. The Mongolians said that the spirit of the mountain had punished the foolhardy

Englishman for disturbing its peace. The lamas' death sentence came too late."

Vladimirov looked up at the snow-capped peak, now shimmering whitely in the sun.

"I wonder if there really is gold there," he said. "I don't think so myself, but everything's possible in Mongolia. There's treasure everywhere, in rivers as well as on the mountains and in the bowels of the earth."

And as though to shoo away an inconvenient thought, Vladimirov added:

"Bah! that traveller was a fool."

XXI

DEVIL'S PASS

THE rest of our journey to the valley of the Tamir was one continuous nightmare. The ground became more and more difficult and the weather was none too pleasant, with frequent snow-storms by day and bitter cold by night.

Vladimirov talked a great deal about *Egin Daban*—Devil's Pass—saying that if we negotiated *that* successfully we need not worry about anything else. The journey from the Tamir to Urga would be mere child's play.

And, in fact, Devil's Pass provided the most horrible experience of my whole existence. For days we had been travelling on gently rising ground. Then we came to the Pass, which lay only a few hundred feet higher. Just below the Pass spread a peaceful Mongolian village, with inviting white tents, grazing cattle, happy-looking inhabitants—a perfect picture of security. But above and past the village lurked a thousand dangers. The ground of Devil's Pass is perilously swampy, with hardly a firm foothold anywhere.

We men took turns walking in front of the caravan, testing the ground with our sticks. Its consistency varied from step to step. It happened more than

once that while one wheel of a cart was on firm ground the other sank deep in the mire. Every now and then a bullock and cart would start sinking and we had to drag them out, with the fear weakening our muscles that we too might drown in the bubbling, squelching sea of mud. To add to our troubles there came a snow-storm, and the howling of the wind mingled with the lowing of the frightened beasts and the shouts of the men—a veritable black-and-white hell, with the mud providing the black.

The storm finally passed and we reached a less dangerous part, a small plateau with a vast number of lakes connected by countless streams. Here too the ground was spongy and our footprints instantly filled with water wherever we walked. The descent on the other side of Devil's Pass was no picnic, either. Here we had the Egin-Gol, a fast mountain stream, or rather cataract, to contend with. The Egin-Gol came thundering down the slope, breaking up into steaming spray as it struck the rocks. A lovely sight on a sunny day—from a safe distance. But we had to cross the Egin-Gol a number of times as it wound its way in our path, and that was no simple matter. We had to carry stones to fill up the bed of the stream, so that the carts might trundle across, and it happened more than once that a team slipped off the stones or dislodged a stone, so that not only it, but also a number of other teams, fell into the water. Nor were even the largest boulders proof against the pressure of the rushing stream, so that we had to rebuild our "pavement" again and again. It took us eleven days to

cross and recross the Egin-Gol until we were done with that troublesome stream.

Then, one glorious day, we found ourselves in the Tamir valley—Paradise to us. Vladimirov decreed a whole day's rest, so, while the rest of the caravan settled down to enjoy a spell of *dolce far niente*, I went out to explore a deserted valley which had attracted my attention on account of some curiously shaped stones that rose in it.

The stones proved to be statues. One was a mighty nude woman with a child standing beside her; the woman's arm was broken off and lay on the ground close by. Her face bore a sad expression and her eyes were fixed on her breasts. The statue probably represented a mother mourning for her child. It was a primitive piece of work, all out of proportion, yet there was life and power in the simple forms.

Another statue was of a scribe gazing with a proud and confident expression at a tablet held in his hand.

As this was Taichi's native land I approached him for information about the statues, and he told me that they were relics of the time when the banks of the Tamir river were occupied by Prince Tamir and the Altin Orda—the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde was Djenghis Khan's personal regiment and acted as his body-guard, and after the fall of the Mongolian empire they founded a new State, of which nothing but these few primitive statues are left.

XXII

SEVENTY-FIVE THOUSAND MILES BY BULLOCK CARAVAN

ON the way from Tamir to Urga we were joined by another caravan, sixteen bullock carts driven by four lamas. They were taking molten butter to market at Urga.

"These bullocks," said Agfan, "will have no fodder for the next fortnight. You see, they've been taken straight from the herd, with the fat of the whole summer's grazing still on them. When you go on a long journey you must never feed the bullocks at first, otherwise the fat in their bodies might catch fire"—this was the expression Agfan used—"and a short journey of 75 miles would tire them out so much that they couldn't go on. But if you give these fattened bullocks no food at first, and only let them out to graze when they've consumed their accumulated fat, then they'll travel any distance easily."

The lamas were fortunate in being relieved of the fodder problem, for this part of Mongolia is completely barren. There was not a blade of grass or a tree to be seen anywhere on the wide expanse of plain, and we ourselves carried loads of cattle food obtained by Vladimirov at Tamir for our 74 bullocks. In the absence of trees we solved the fuel problem on our nightly halts by collecting desiccated dung on the

road. An hour or so before we were due to stop two or three of us drivers went off with sacks slung over our shoulders and picked up whatever dry horse, cattle or camel dung we could find, though dung-picking also went on during the day, because we had to ensure each day a sufficiency of fuel for cooking our supper and breakfast.

* * * *

One evening as we pitched camp we heard from a great distance the squeaking of many cart-wheels.

“That’s probably Cinde,” remarked Agfan.

Upon inquiry I learned that Cinde was a “character,” a comparatively young lama who had accomplished fifty-two caravan journeys from Uliasutai to Urga and back, a total distance of 75,000 miles. In addition, Cinde possessed tremendous physical strength and could throw a bullock—for shoeing—in a few seconds.

In the morning I made Cinde’s acquaintance as his caravan passed us on the road. He was returning empty from Urga after delivering a load of wool.

* * * *

Travelling by caravan in Mongolia is a hard life, but gradually I got “broken in,” and even came to enjoy it. After a few days we reached the Orchon river, meeting many Mongolian caravans as we went. Here and there we came upon a dead bullock, horse or camel, abandoned by passing caravans, to be consumed by wolves at night, or even by day when the road was clear of caravans.

THE NEW MONGOLIA

I found that wolves were as common in this part of Mongolia as dogs are in any European country. Once or twice, when we halted near a nomad camp, I saw the cattlemen chase away a pack of wolves with almost casual shouts of "Ay! ay!"

* * * *

While Agfan, Taichi and the other Mongolians were driving the bullocks across the Orchon I took a stroll along the bank and was interested to notice that the river was simply alive with fish. Fishing, I found, is an almost unknown occupation in Mongolia, as for some unfathomable reason Mongolians do not eat fish.

It was sunset by the time the whole caravan was across and the sky was crimson in the east. Yes, in the east, not in the west, for in Mongolia it is the eastern horizon that is painted red as the sun sinks in the west.

* * * *

On the other side of the river Vladimirov came up to me and said:

"When we reach the Tola river I'll go ahead to Urga with the horses. You can come with me if you like."

I jumped at the offer, for Urga could be reached in four days on horseback, instead of the eternity that the caravan would take. There would be no saddle or harness for me, but that did not matter.

Soon after this we reached the Tola river and forded

it. The Tola is the river of the *Bogdo Chure*, or Sacred Monastery. It passes the *Bogdo Gegen's* palace at Urga and is a tributary of the Orchon.

I made a halter and reins from string and rode off with Vladimirov in happy anticipation.

* * * *

We rode on until evening, with never a soul anywhere around us. It was bitterly cold and my hands were so numbed that I could hardly hold the reins. It was getting darker and darker, we were both hungry and terribly cold, with no prospect of comfortable lodgings for the night. Suddenly we heard the barking of dogs and galloped away in the direction of the sounds. Soon we came upon a large camp, with inviting tents and big, comforting camp fires. We entered the first tent, in which a company of Mongolians was gathered.

"Are we right for Urga?" asked Vladimirov after the usual greetings.

The Mongolians stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Well," said Vladimirov somewhat impatiently, "are we right for *Bogdo Chure*?"

"Yes, yes," replied the men in chorus, "it's a little further east."

Most Mongolians do not know that their capital is called Urga; they only know it as *Bogdo Chure* (Sacred Monastery).

"The Reds are making for *Bogdo Chure*," remarked one of the men.

"The Reds?" ejaculated Vladimirov in alarm.

"Well," shrugged the man, "the devil knows what they are. Their commander is called Baron Ungern."

"Baron Ungern?" said Vladimirov, more to himself. "He can't be a Red, surely? He was adjutant to General Semenov, who fought against the Reds. Everything's all right," he said turning to me. "We'll settle your difficulty somehow, and you can be in Peking long before Ungern reaches Urga. The main thing is that we should get to Urga as soon as possible."

After drinking a few cups of tea we threw ourselves into the saddle and galloped off. On reaching the last pass we met a Mongolian caravan coming down the slope.

"We wish you a good journey," said we. "Where do you come from?"

"*Churenté*" (from Urga), was the reply. "The Chinese have surrounded the city and won't allow anyone to leave. They're requisitioning horses and carts."

Vladimirov went white. He was afraid for his caravan.

"Come on," he said. "We'll see what we will see."

On the morning of the fourth day since we left the caravan, after an epic day and night ride, we sighted the Mongolian capital from a mountain pass to the west of the city. It was a dazzling, unforgettable sight. Directly below us shimmered the waters of the Tola in the morning sun, while away to the east rose the gilt roofs and cupolas of the Ganden monastery—the wealthiest in all Mongolia—with buildings painted with bright colours and white tents decorated

with red and blue. The bright houses of the Chinese quarter with their fantastically ornate roofs seemed to beckon to me as I sat in the saddle staring down upon Urga, visualising the clamour and movement of the streets, with caravans passing to and fro and pavements thronged with brightly dressed crowds of Mongolians and Chinese—throbbing life after the silence of the Mongolian steppe.

XXIII

URGA—AT LAST

IN honour of the great occasion I made a hasty “toilet,” changing from my ancient moccasins into top-boots. Then we finished the last of the provisions we had brought with us and set off to face whatever there was to face. Our prospects were neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but a bit of both. In front of us lay Urga, seat of the Grand Lama, the *Bogdo Gegen*, a strange and beautiful city which many travellers long to reach for the sake of its many secrets; there it lay like a mighty trayful of the queer fruits of the east; but the base of the Holy Mountain was stamped hard by the wheels of heavy artillery, Chinese soldiers were marching past the gilt-roofed temples of *Bogdo Chure*, and there were grey-clad Chinese patrols marching about among the silk-robed Mongolians.

The city was more than ten miles ahead of us, but the crystal-clear air made it appear as though it were quite close. As we descended into the valley of the Tola we heard the noise of horses’ hooves behind us. There was a terrific cloud of dust speeding towards us. We stopped in our tracks and waited. A few minutes later we were able to discern the cause of the dust cloud—a Mongol rider with seven horses besides his mount.

We heaved a sigh of relief—it was not a Chinese patrol, as we had feared. The Mongolian was an *urton* rider stationed at Urga and he was on his way back to the capital after accompanying a high official to a nearby *urton* post. We questioned him excitedly about the situation in Urga.

“Well,” he said, “it’s quite true—the Chinese arrest everybody entering the city and, what is worse, they take away the horses. Of course, I’m safe, because my horses are *urton* horses.”

We begged him to accompany us, and after a great deal of persuasion Vladimirov struck a bargain with the Mongolian, who agreed to try and save our mounts. We smoked the usual pipe of friendship together, then the three of us rode on towards Urga. Our plan was quite simple. As we were nearing the Chinese pickets the Mongolian would take the reins of our mounts, as though they too were *urton* horses, and Vladimirov and I would lie flat on our horses as our only hope of escaping notice.

A few hours later, rounding a bend, we found ourselves within half a mile of a Chinese outpost, with tents and soldiers clearly visible. A few yards in front of us was a water-course which had to be crossed. The critical moment had arrived. Vladimirov and I hugged our horses’ necks and handed the reins to the Mongolian. We crossed the water-course and, with our hearts in our mouths, rode at a distance of a few hundred yards past the Chinese soldiers. They did not notice Vladimirov and me!

Rounding a bend in the road, we came to a Mon-

golian encampment. Our guide dismounted, entered one of the tents, and after a few minutes returned to us with a reassuring grin on his face.

"You're all right," he said. "The next sentry post is held by Mongolians. They'll let you through all right. When we reach the town, you must look neither to the right nor to the left, but just ride on with me."

The Mongolian sentries did not even challenge us. On the outskirts of the city the Mongolian told us to dismount and walk, he taking charge of our horses.

We entered Urga on the Garden side, close to the Chinese quarter. My first glimpse of the Mongolian capital was a wide street with two armed Chinese sentries at the far end of it.

"To the left," whispered the Mongolian, "that little street there!"

We crossed the wide street as directed and were within a few yards of the side street when somebody behind us shouted:

"Hey! Stop!"

Vladimirov and I involuntarily paused and turned round. Two Chinese soldiers were running towards us, fumbling with their rifles in an ominous way. I sensed, rather than knew, that our Mongolian had vanished—together with our horses.

"Where from? And where to?" demanded one of the Chinamen.

We realised that we could gain nothing by lying, so we told the truth.

"From Uliasutai to Urga."

"Any arms on you?"



MOTOR CAR AND CAMEL CARAVAN



NATIONAL THEATRE AT URGU

(Designed by Joseph Geleia)



CHOINI LUSSAN CHINDE
The Dalai Lama's Minister at Urga

"No," replied Vladimirov, who had left his revolver and Lanchester with the caravan.

The soldiers immediately became less watchful. After turning all our pockets inside out, and finding nothing, one of them gave the order:

"*Tsu-ba!*" ("Come on!") "To the police."

They led us through narrow, filthy streets, with groups of Chinese standing in doorways, some of them pointing at us and jeering:

"*Moza, moza! Baro nes.*" ("Russians, Russians, the Baron's men.")

Now we're in for it, I thought as we arrived at the police station, a building after the Chinese style, with soldiers passing in and out every second. We were taken in separately; Vladimirov preceded me. When my turn came I was ushered into an office and found myself face to face with a Chinese official.

"Who're you?" he asked in Russian.

"I'm a Hungarian prisoner of war. I've escaped from Russia and want to get home."

"You're not Russian?"

"No. Here's my passport from Uliasutai."

As he examined my passport his face brightened. He picked up his writing brush, wrote something into my passport, stamped it with a rubber stamp and handed it back to me.

"You're all right," he said with a friendly smile. "You're not Russian, so I'll give you a piece of advice. If you have a friend at Urga, go to him as quickly as you can, and don't show yourself in the street while you're here."

I thanked him, but as I did so it flashed through my mind that his advice was little use to me, since I had no one in Urga I could go to. The Chinaman noticed my indecision.

"Why don't you go?" he said. "You ought to be glad to get off so easily."

"Yes," I said, "and I'm duly grateful. The trouble is, I have no one to go to."

"Well," said the Chinaman, "then I'll order the Russian you came with to take care of you. Yes," he added, pleased with his brain-wave, "the Russian must take you in."

Vladimirov had no objection. On the contrary, he felt that my presence in his house would in some way improve his own position in the eyes of the Chinese.

XXIV

URGA ATTACKED. CHINESE DEFENDERS PILLAGE THE CITY

THE walk from the police station to Vladimirov's house took a long time. Urga occupies 30 square miles to its 80,000 inhabitants, and the city mainly consists of Mongolian tents and small ground-level houses with vast court-yards, so that it takes time to walk even from one house to the next. There were Chinese soldiers everywhere, but this time we were not afraid of them, for we had our duly viséd passports in our pockets.

Arrived at Vladimirov's house we had our first proper wash and shave in weeks, and with the latter operation I ceased to be "*Sine Sachall*" (Newbeard) for good. Vladimirov could not forget his horses.

"Well," he said, "the Chinese have let us off, but that blasted Mongolian has gone off with my horses."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when our Mongolian appeared in the court-yard with Vladimirov's horses. We rushed out to him and Vladimirov somewhat shamefacedly saluted him.

"I managed to save your horses from the Chinese," said the *urton* rider. "When the soldiers challenged us I simply galloped off."

Vladimirov offered him a "little extra" beyond the

price agreed upon for his services, but the Mongolian resolutely refused the tip.

"A bargain *is* a bargain," he said proudly. "I've done no more than I undertook to do."

Then he extended to us his upturned palms and we, in turn, placed our palms on top of them, this being the Mongolian ceremonial mode of salutation. The Mongolian then turned on his heels and left us without another word.

* * * *

Vladimirov's wife was not at home, having earlier that day gone on a visit to the other end of the city, a considerable distance away, so the evening meal was served by Vladimirov's man-servant. After dinner my host showed me to the "best room," and while he returned to the dining-room to discuss domestic matters with his children and servants I undressed and, for the first time in many, many weeks, luxuriously reclined on a real bed.

I was awakened by the noise of shooting, mingled with the frightened crying of children, which seemed to come from the cellar. I dressed in a hurry, keeping well away from the window, through which bullet after bullet was whizzing into the room, peppering the opposite wall in an irregular pattern. This went on for about half an hour, after which the firing ceased and the din of the explosions was replaced by the noise of tramping feet, hooting motor-cars and confused cries. Vladimirov and I rushed to the window. Dawn was breaking and in the twilight we

could see Chinese troops running in the direction of the broadcasting station, motor-cars racing hither and thither and crowds of civilians dashing about in noisy confusion.

Suddenly there came a high-pitched hiss, immediately followed by a terrific explosion, and a cloud of dust rose in front of the house. Vladimirov's children and servants were already in the cellar. Now we thought it advisable to join them. Although we had no information as to what was going on outside, we guessed that Baron Ungern-Sternberg was bombarding the Chinese barracks close by, and we were confirmed in this belief as grenade after grenade exploded in front of the house.

It was full day when we finally emerged from our hiding-place. We then learned that Baron Ungern-Sternberg had, during the night, made a surprise attack on the city, but had been beaten back by the Chinese.

Vladimirov was worried about his wife—partly because there was no bread in the house. However, that part of the problem was soon solved by my offer to bake bread and cook food for the children. In the early afternoon a Mongolian messenger arrived from Madame Vladimirov with a message to the effect that the Chinese will not allow anyone to leave the Chure quarter—where she was—and that she was safe and sound in the house of a Russian trader, and only waiting to be allowed to go home.

Later in the afternoon the house was invaded by Chinese soldiers who turned everything upside down, smashing in wardrobes and emptying drawers on the

floor, and taking away anything that took their fancy. Vladimirov looked on, too terrified to utter a sound. When the soldiers had carried off all they could lay hands on, they finally left the house and we then learned from terrified neighbours that the Chinese were pillaging the city. The manager of the gold-mine—we were told—was “saving” the co-operative’s goods by transferring them to his own warehouse. This was a significant piece of news, because it meant that the Russians were also looting. The whole city was in the grip of terror from the military robber bands, who were reported now here, now there.

This state of affairs continued for three whole days, with Yellow and White terrorising the city, until, at last, the Reds came to stop them. General Chu and his men made an end of the pillage simply and effectively. When one of the General’s officers met in the street two Chinese soldiers laden with stolen goods he drew his revolver and shot them both dead. There was peace and quiet after that.

Meanwhile, there was much anxious speculation in the city as to what Baron Ungern really wanted. True, he had been beaten back, and his attempt to take the city by surprise had been frustrated, but the forces at his disposal were by no means negligible and they were undoubtedly well organised and equipped. In the end it was decided to send an “international” deputation to treat with Ungern, a deputation composed of Mongolians, Russians and Chinese, lest he should become suspicious. It was thought that the White general—the “Liberator,” as he called himself

—might agree to leave Urga alone on payment of a sum of money.

The Russians nominated Baron Tessinghausen, former Governor of Orenburg; the Chinese also appointed someone to represent them on the deputation, while the appointment of the Mongolian representative was left to the *Bogdo Gegen*, who pretended to be in agreement with the plan.

However, the Russian and Chinese members of the deputation waited for hours in vain in front of the Russian Consulate, from where the deputation was to start, for the *Bogdo Gegen's* nominee. Then they left in disgust and the idea of a deputation was abandoned. The *Bogdo Gegen* apparently still believed in Baron Ungern's sincerity and would not support the Chinese in any move that might prove detrimental to him.

THE BOMB FACTORY

THE next few days promised to be full of excitement. It was reported that Ungern had collected his defeated army and was preparing for another attack on the city. The Chinese accordingly took such defensive measures as they thought expedient, urged to increased effort by occasional reminders from Ungern's heavy artillery, which sent a shot into the city every now and then. I myself spent my time cooking Hungarian dishes for the Vladimirov family.

One morning, as I was frying onions for the goulash, I heard a loud noise from the living-room and, leaving the onions to take care of themselves, went in to investigate. I found the room full of Chinese soldiers, with Vladimirov's trembling manservant in the midst of them. They wanted to know who he was, and I gathered that their curiosity had been aroused by the fact that the Cossack lad had, upon their arrival, tried to hide behind the stove.

The discussion ended with the word "*Tsu-ba!*" (come along), spoken sharply by one of the Chinese. I tried to make myself scarce, but the soldiers had already seen me, and I too was peremptorily ordered to "come along." In vain did I show them my Chinese passport; all they could say was, "*Tsu-ba! Tsu-ba!*"

I was obliged to dress and follow them. They took us to the barracks, where a hulking brute of a Chinaman tied our hands behind our backs with thin string, linking us together with a rope which he threaded through between our wrists. Then we were taken out into the street once more, escorted by three soldiers, who seemed to take great delight in loading their rifles before our eyes and clicking the bolt particularly hard. They took us to a dragon-roofed Chinese house, pushing us through a series of courts into a guard-room. My hands were already numb with the cold and the cruel pressure of the tightly-drawn string round my wrists and I heaved a sigh of relief when the string was cut. But my relief was premature. The Chinaman placed one end of a steel chain round the Cossack's neck, and after securing it firmly passed the other end round my neck, locking it in the same way. The connecting part of the chain was only a few inches long. With this steel collar round our necks, we were shoved through a door into an open kitchen and left there in charge of a guard.

To add to my troubles the Cossack experienced an irresistible urge to withdraw and when, with a great deal of expressive pantomime, he managed to make the guard understand what he wanted, I naturally had to accompany him. When the Cossack crouched down I had to do the same, and what with the discomfort of the unaccustomed position, the chain dragging at my neck, and the Cossack behaving as he must, I had a right unpleasant time of it.

In the evening they took us, still in chains, to the police. Fortunately, the Chinese official whom I met on my arrival in Urga was there, and at his orders the chain was immediately removed from our necks. The soldiers had sidled in after us, grinning with satisfaction at the thought of our imminent demise by the executioner's axe, but the official kicked them out, and now it was our turn to look pleased.

We were given some hot tea, and the Chinese official once again proved a good friend to me by sending me, with an introduction, to a Russian school occupied by former Denikin officers. The Chinaman thought that I should be safer living with them than at Vladimirov's house.

The Russians had all been officers of high rank in the Tsarist army. Had we met at the front during the war, either I should have murdered them or vice versa. Now, however, their leader, General Sniegovski, received me with great friendliness. Unfortunately, the Russians could only supply me with lodgings but not with food, and I was obliged to think of a way of making money. The officers were in the same boat and were trying their hands at the most varied occupations in order to earn a living.

* * * *

At about this time the Chinese succeeded in chasing Ungern-Sternberg and his hordes away from the region of Urga and there began a period of calm. In association with several Russian officers I established what, for lack of a better term, might be described as a

smoked sausage factory. With great difficulty we scraped together sufficient money to pay for the raw material of the first few pounds of sausage. I had considered the matter thoroughly and decided that, since I had nothing to lose in any case, the venture was worth trying. After all, it could not be difficult to stuff mincemeat into a length of gut and smoke it, and the result was sure to be edible.

Accordingly, we started to make sausages, General Sniegovski and a Colonel cutting up and mincing the meat—very efficiently too—and I and a few others mixing in the other ingredients and attending to the manufacturing processes, as well as to the selling side. The Mongolians seemed to like the strange food, so a few of us made quite a good living out of our sausages.

But I did not stay in the business for long. I could not get away from Urga, because Ungern-Sternberg's troops were still infesting the territories around Urga, and particularly the road to Peking; but someone at our "hotel" conceived the idea of establishing a foundry, and I preferred that to sausage-making. The Chinese were greatly in favour of the plan, thinking that it might be possible to manufacture in Urga mines with which all the roads leading to the city could be protected, so that Ungern could never take it. This was a matter of great urgency at the time, as it was known that the Baron was planning another attack on Urga. He had retired with his army to the Cecen district, to the east of Urga, compelling the able-bodied male population to join him, and had then moved south and placed himself astride the Urga-Peking road.

At the suggestion of the Chinese we filled a shrapnel case with gunpowder, placed a motor-car plug in the middle, and exploded it from a distance by electricity. The test was a complete success and the shrapnel exploded. The entire Chinese General Staff was present at the great event, and there and then it was decided to manufacture bombs in Urga. And I was appointed designer of the bombs.

The Chinese gave me a nicely-furnished house, which I shared with a few Chinese officers. My laboratory, an ordinary room, was not particularly well equipped, but lack of proper instruments was to some extent counter-balanced by the presence of about a hundredweight of dynamite!

The house was guarded by Chinese sentries. Generally speaking, I lived "like a lord." Each morning before lunch I had a refreshing gallop round the town, accompanied by a Chinese officer who acted as my body-guard. Each evening, at seven o'clock sharp, I was visited by General Chu's adjutant and a military engineer. They told me a few things about Europe, about Russia—and I found that these stern men were just children, without the least notion of the capacity of a modern army or to what extent they had to fear Baron Ungern-Sternberg. They thought that the Bogdo Ul is such a tall mountain that it would effectively bar Ungern-Sternberg's way from the south, so they made no arrangements to fortify it. Then, one fine day, Ungern climbed the passes of Bogdo Ul and kidnapped the *Bogdo Gegen* from his "carefully guarded" palace.

This exploit brought the Chinese to their senses and they began to be anxious about the mines before the foundry was finished. It occurred to me that it might be possible to produce mines without a thick metal casing, and the Chinese eagerly fell in with my suggestion to use empty petrol tins. We filled the petrol tins with artillery gunpowder, placed a motor-car plug in the middle and closed the tin. We continued this highly dangerous work for three days, in a laboratory full of gunpowder and dynamite, closing the lids of petrol tins filled with explosives with the aid of a red-hot soldering iron! In the course of making, the mines might have exploded at any moment, and that would have been a "big bang."

We made a total of forty mines, which the Chinese buried in the roads leading to Urga, artificially freezing the ground above the mines.

Meanwhile the foundry was finished and one fine day we made a test casting. The previous day we had agreed with the Chinese that when we had cast 200 mines they would take all the prisoners of war then in Urga by car to Peking. We awaited the result of the test with tense excitement. Unfortunately, the manager of the foundry had blundered, and it was not the iron but the bricks that melted. It was decided to obtain fire-bricks from the gold-mine, and that evening the Chinese General Staff held a protracted meeting to discuss the question.

XXVI

UNGERN MAKES A BLOOD BATH IN URGU

AS a result of this meeting the General Staff sent a lorry to the gold-mine for fire-bricks. Three days later the lorry returned—empty. The driver had strayed off the right road and instead of driving to Dzumodo, 74 miles from Urga, where the gold-mine was, he went in an entirely different direction and was glad to have come back alive.

There was great disappointment in the Chinese camp.

“What are we to do now, Mr. Geleta?” asked the Colonel.

“I’ll go to Dzumodo myself,” I said.

“Do you know the road?”

“No, but I’ll find it somehow. Give me a guide and post horses. I’ll be ready within the hour.”

An hour later the saddle horses were ready in the court-yard, where the Colonel and his officers were waiting in great agitation. Hasty farewells, a glance at the map, then we were off.

“Good luck, Mr. Geleta,” called the Colonel. “If possible, try to repair the telephone line, so that we can hear from you.”..

They gave me two guides instead of one. My equipment consisted of a revolver with ten cartridges,

a few yards of wire, and a riding crop. Little did I think that in undertaking this errand I was escaping one of the worst examples of bloody terror in the history of Urga.

* * * *

Dzumodo lies north of Urga. Before the war it was the centre of a group of gold-mines worked by a Russian company, but at this period the mines were lying idle, the recent upheavals having frightened the shareholders and managers away. The Tsarist currency had depreciated to such an extent that the millions of roubles with which the safes were crammed were only worth a few Chinese dollars. Baron Tessinghausen, the managing director, had gone to Urga, and thence to Peking, and the central office was left in charge of a book-keeper.

Dzumodo lay quiet and almost deserted under a mantle of snow. The few people living there were shut off from the rest of the world, as they were not allowed to enter Urga, and they were therefore short of food, tea and salt. I quickly repaired the telephone line at the few points where the poles had been uprooted by storms, then I reported to the book-keeper and told him the object of my coming. The store-rooms were full of material that could be used in the manufacture of bombs, and the book-keeper agreed to let us have the lot, provided we would take with us two or three of his carts and send them back with a load of provisions from Urga.

I readily accepted this offer, particularly as, in

addition to fire-bricks for the foundry, the book-keeper could give us a sufficiency of dynamite, copper wire and even sulphuric acid, of which there was great scarcity in Urga.

Having talked the matter over we sat down in the office for a quiet smoke. Suddenly the telephone began to ring. The book-keeper took a bound for the instrument.

"Someone talking Chinese. . . ."

One of my guides took the receiver from him, then handed it to me.

"Is that you, Mr. Galeta?" came the Colonel's question in Russian.

"Yes. What news?"

"We're immensely pleased you repaired the line. Come back at once. There's a battle going on with Ungern six miles from the city. Keep to the west of the mail route. But hurry, hurry!"

The Colonel then asked me what we had found and asked me to bring the dynamite, in particular, at once.

* * * *

We loaded the carts and started for Urga. It was bitterly cold—umpteens degrees below zero. The Chinaman driving the dynamite cart sat placidly on a box of dynamite, urging his horse to greater speed over the bumpy road. The dynamite was frozen and the slightest shock might have resulted in an explosion. But this was not the time to bother about trifles.

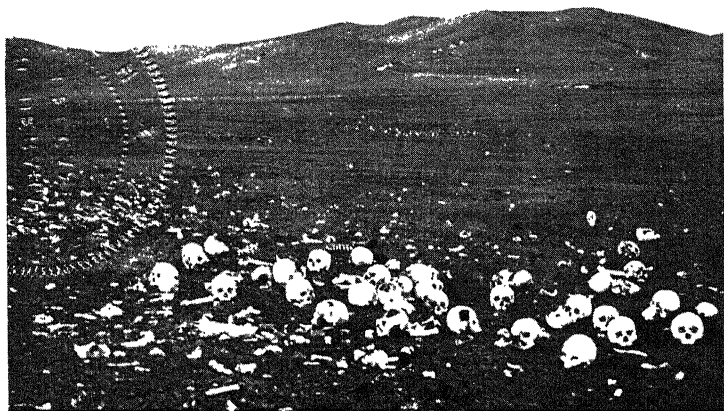
The next day we reached the Chinese farms. There were soldiers everywhere—a bad sign. The Chinese



NADAN WRESTLING CHAMPION OF 1928



HALF-EATEN BODIES



HUMAN BONES AND SKULLS AT THE "CEMETERY"

Command were trying to concentrate all their forces in Urga and these troops ought to be making for the capital with all speed. However, they obviously preferred to take their ease at a safe distance from the seat of the trouble, and we even met individual soldiers walking or riding in the opposite direction.

In the afternoon we reached the last pass. We found there a vast camp, hundreds of carts laden with hay, meat, oats, flour. But the camp was deserted. The majority of the carts had no horses in front of them and I guessed that the Chinese had used them as a means of escape. Every now and then a rider flashed past us.

"What's wrong?" I shouted.

"Ungern's taken Urga," came the reply, and the rider was already out of sight.

"Ungern's made a blood bath in Urga," said others, stopping for a moment. "Everybody is fleeing."

My guides and I looked at one another in bewilderment. What were we to do now? In the end we decided that as we could not go on to Urga we must go back to Dzumodo. However, we were in no immediate danger, as the victorious army was still many miles away, so we fed and rested our exhausted horses and tried to take a little rest ourselves. Meanwhile, the pass became crowded with the remnants of the routed army, who were pouring out of Urga towards the north and south. It was the same all along the way back to Dzumodo. Night was falling as we started. It was bitterly cold and a brilliant moon shone serenely over our troubled world. I was

thinking of the things I had left behind in Urga, my diary, my money, clothes, a small collection of curios and above all my horse, all bought and accumulated at the cost of months of hard toil.

Late the following day I was startled out of my reverie by a sharp "Halt!" A bayonet flashed in front of my face and as I looked up I realised that we were back at Dzumodo, at the gates of a Chinese farm we had passed a few days before. The gates were guarded by two Chinese sentries.

"*Lu-bo*," I said mechanically, that being the Chinese password I had learnt at Urga.

The sentries allowed me to pass into the courtyard, which was full of horses and men. The first man I met was my Chinese Colonel.

"Good day, Colonel," I said.

"Hullo, Mr. Geleta, I'm so glad you're here. I'll announce you to the General at once."

I dismounted and handed the reins to a soldier. Looking round for my companions, I realised that they must have deserted me along go, for the carts were nowhere to be seen. I went into the General's office and was glad to find myself among old friends at last. I was given a glass of hot tea and a sort of thick pancake, and in a few minutes my depression of the previous twenty-four hours was gone.

The officers told me what had happened at Urga. Baron Ungern entered Urga from the south, through the valley of Bogdo Ul, which the Chinese had left almost entirely unguarded, thinking that Ungern could not attack from that direction. His attack was a

complete surprise, with the result that the Baron with his few thousand men succeeded in scattering the whole Chinese army. General Chu himself only escaped with difficulty, while the Colonel owed his life to my horse. The whole of Urga was now in Ungern-Sternberg's hands, including the Chinese war chest of nearly nine million dollars. The Chinese army was now making for the township of Maimachen, on the Russo-Mongolian border, where General Chu hoped to reorganise it, though at the moment the men were almost completely out of hand.

At nine o'clock the next morning we broke up. I hardly recognised my horse. It was no longer the well-fed, well-groomed animal I had left in Urga but a pitiful creature of skin and bone with a bad limp and a sore back. However, it carried me heroically. The Colonel was riding beside me, telling me the details of the shameful defeat.

Suddenly the air was shattered by a mighty explosion, then another, then another. We spurred our horses and galloped away, not knowing what the explosions portended. Later that day we learned that my companions of the day before had abandoned the dynamite cart at a farm in the vicinity of Dzumodo. In order to prevent the dynamite falling into the hands of Ungern's pursuing army, some Chinese soldiers decided to throw the cases into a well. As the well was frozen in, impact with the ice exploded the first case, and this led to a series of explosions which destroyed the well and killed the Chinamen standing around.

A few hours' riding brought us to a Chinese farm

on the bank of the frozen Chara river. The farm was overrun by soldiers, who were terrorising the proprietors and stealing their horses and cattle. It was a case of every man for himself and the officers tried in vain to restore discipline. General Chu's army, under the shock of their sudden defeat, had become a panic-stricken rabble and in their haste to get as far ahead of the pursuing army as possible they did not hesitate to rob their compatriots. While the farmers were crouching in corners in fear of their lives, the soldiers shot their pigs and cattle, and breaking open the corn bins shovelled the corn in front of their horses. And all the time more and more soldiers were streaming in from all directions, some on horseback, some on foot, until every foot of the farmyard was thronged with a struggling, shouting mass of humanity.

“SHOOT THESE BEGGARS!”

AT the next farm we were at last able to get some sleep. In the morning the Colonel woke me up to inform me of the arrival of an Austrian prisoner of war, a sculptor named Istl, who, the Colonel said, was in such a desperate condition that he would surely die unless we took care of him. It was decided that I should take him under my wing, and to provide for emergencies, we were to be escorted on the journey by an officer.

We resumed our journey over the snow-covered Mongolian steppe, which was dotted with fleeing Chinese, some walking, others riding on horses, bullocks or in carts. While Istl and I talked our Chinese escort vanished, and I was alone with my sick charge. Coming to some hayricks we lay down to rest, while our horses greedily fell upon the hay. As we lay there the stream of refugees continued to flow on and on.

There was another wave approaching us—fully-armed soldiers. They noticed our horses from afar and came up at the double, aiming their rifles at us. I jumped up and waved my handkerchief towards them; then, when they were close enough, we showed them our papers. Gradually we were surrounded and

one soldier on the fringe of the crowd suddenly threw himself on my horse and galloped away. Istl's horse was stolen in the same way and, as though this had been a prearranged sign, the other soldiers fell upon us and, turning out our pockets, cleaned us out completely. Then came the unpleasantly familiar command:

"Tsu-ba! We're sure you're Russians after all."

They took us along, our captors riding and we walking beside them in the snow, with one hand secured with string to the saddle. However, I was in luck. After a few hours of this torment I suddenly heard someone calling my name. It was a Chinese carpenter who had been employed at the foundry, and when he heard about our treatment he gave the soldiers a dressing down and made them release Istl and myself. But of course my horse was gone.

We continued our tramp with the carpenter and coming upon a deserted Mongolian tent we entered it, found a bag of meat dumplings, supped off them and lay down to sleep. By the time I woke up in the morning the Chinese carpenter had already found me a seat on a cart and a mount for Istl. When we were ready to start he said good-bye and disappeared. When we reached the next farm, however, my Chinaman was already waiting for us. He had a little surprise for us—a dish of roast pork, and vermicelli with cream cheese. He seemed immensely pleased with himself when he saw the expression of gratitude on our faces, but as soon as the meal was served he vanished once more.

Istl and I were dead tired, so we settled down for

a snooze. But hardly had I closed my eyes when the room was invaded by soldiers and we were dragged off. The soldiers glared at us with hatred in their eyes and kept mumbling to themselves, “*Moza, moza*” (“Russians”). They surrounded us, cocking their rifles with significant ostentation and repeating the word “*Tsu-ba*” with ominous meaning. This time, I thought, they were going to put us against a wall. We were making for another building some distance away, where Chinese officers were stationed.

Another grey caravan was arriving from the south, headed by an officer on horseback and as we crossed their path I suddenly bawled out:

“Lui-Ju-Fu!”

My luck held. The officer was a member of the General Staff, whom I knew well.

“What have you been doing, Mr. Geleta?” said Lui-Ju-Fu in surprise.

“Nothing at all. We have been trying to get away, like everybody else, but whenever we meet with Chinese soldiers we’re accused of being Russians and they all want to shoot us. If we hadn’t been fortunate enough to meet with friends at the critical moment, we would have been the prey of wolves long ago.”

Lui-Ju-Fu asked our captors what they intended to do with us.

“Well,” said they, “we found them in the kitchen and the Commandant said we’d better shoot these beggars.”

So that was what we were escaping from!

Lui-Ju-Fu ordered the soldiers to take us to the

Commandant. There the matter was cleared up and we were handed over to one of the transports to take us to Maimachen. We thanked Lui-Ju-Fu for saving our lives and joined the transport—so-called for lack of a better term. In reality they were nothing but a group of undisciplined soldiers with a few carts and saddle horses between them, obeying their superiors only when it suited their immediate purpose.

At all events Istl, being still weak, was given a mount, and all went well for a few hours. Istl was riding alongside the others, while I was tramping beside him. Then Istl's mount was stolen by a rather clever trick. It was now pitch-dark and Istl, thinking that the animal must be tired, dismounted, leading the horse by a length of rope. When he wanted to remount he found that the end of the rope that had been attached to the halter was now fastened to the shaft of a cart! And apart from the driver of the cart, the entire "transport" had vanished. However, we saw in this nothing to worry about, and tramped on into the night. By the morning we were able to solve the problem of locomotion in a somewhat original way. We met a Mongolian refugee from Urga and with his expert assistance we caught three of the bullocks that, abandoned by their owners, were roaming about the steppe, and we simply used them as mounts.

The way to Maimachen lay through a vast pine forest. On the fringe of the forest we met some more acquaintances from Urga. They talked about their plans, what each would do at Maimachen, and I found that, of all that crowd, Istl and I were the only ones who

would have no one to turn to when we arrived at our destination. I suppose I ought to have been glad to have escaped with my life, yet I felt pretty hopeless, for I realised that, at best, it would take a long, long time before I could get back to Urga and continue my journey home. However, in spite of all my misfortunes I was lucky. This time it was a familiar voice that drove away my depression. It came from behind me, calling my name. As I turned round I found myself face to face with a Chinese General mounted on a splendid black mare, only the General was not a General but Lu, my faithful batman, who cooked my meals and cleaned my boots while I was in the employ of the General Staff at Urga. Where he obtained the gorgeous uniform and the black mare I had no idea. Lu was immensely pleased to see me and literally fell on my neck.

“I’ve been looking for you, Mr. Geleta,” said Lu in German, having spent five years of his life in Germany. “I’ve got some food on me, and money too.”

He opened his saddle-bag and there and then I made a hearty meal of some excellent pastries he had brought. We—Istl and I—were saved. After a short journey we reached a Russian village named Ibtsigi, where Lu obtained for us a comfortable room and also vodka and milk for our supper.

By the next morning we were completely rested, and in spite of the bitter cold—this was in February—we travelled in comparative comfort. The road lay through the forest and the shadows cast by the tal-

trees made it difficult to tell whether it was day or night. The sun was high in the heavens by the time we emerged from the forest into a wide plain. Several hours' walk took us within sight of the Russian town of Kiachta, and then Maimachen, a smallish town on the Mongolian side. A motor-car was approaching from the opposite direction. It was driven by a Chinaman from Urga whom we all knew. To my amazement Istl and the Mongolian who had helped us with the bullocks ran off without a word to meet the car. After a brief talk with the driver they got in, the car turned round and within a few minutes was out of sight. Lu must have read my thoughts as I gazed after the car.

"Don't let that worry you," he said. "As Con-Fu-Che said, 'When winter comes and most trees lose their foliage—it is then we know which is the pine and which the cyprus.' The sooner you find out, the better. Anyhow, the town is only a few miles away, and we've got plenty of money."

Lu found us lodgings with a chemist in Maimachen and I had a proper rest at last, with such amenities and even luxuries as were available. The cost of living in Maimachen was next to nothing. There were thousands of stolen bullocks and horses, so prices were low—fifty kopecks for a horse and one rouble for a bullock, and provisions were cheap in proportion. I lived "like a lord" during those days at Maimachen, yet I was feeling far from happy. Russia was too near for that.

Incidentally, a few days after our arrival we received a visit from a shamefaced Istl. Lu gave him what he wanted and I never saw him after that.

XXVIII

UNGERN-STERMBERG THE "APOSTLE"

I STAYED in Maimachen for a few weeks, then, when Lu had gone away after his own concerns and I found myself without money or work, I adopted smuggling. My business took me, among other places, to Troiskosavsk, another border town, where I met the Russian girl who, after a brief courtship, became my wife. She was the daughter of a Russian merchant, one of my business connections. I settled down in Troiskosavsk and lived peacefully for some months, resigning myself to the idea that I had reached the end of my journey, at any rate for a long, long while.

However, it was not to be. Circumstances soon compelled me to resume my peregrinations through Mongolia. But before I continue my own personal story, I think it will be well to pause here and recount what I know about Baron Ungern-Sternberg, whom I have seen described as a legendary hero, a profound philosopher, an apostle and a saviour. My information about the Baron and the Whites who served under him is authentic, inasmuch as it is partly first hand and partly derived from sources whose reliability it is impossible for me to doubt.

Baron Ungern-Sternberg—as he himself boasted—came from a family of Baltic pirates. During the

White campaign against the Bolsheviks he was adjutant to General Semenov, and when the latter was beaten by the Reds, Ungern-Sternberg's hordes were driven eastwards into Dauria, which is a district located in a corner formed by the frontiers of three countries—Russia, China and Mongolia. At that time Ungern-Sternberg disposed of some 4,000 White Russian troops, whose number was later increased to about 6,000 by Chinese "*hun-hu*" or robber bands, who were in the habit of joining any fighting force that was able to pay for their services or at least hold out a hope of rich loot.

Ungern-Sternberg had the "choice" of three countries, and he finally decided to march into Mongolia, probably because he anticipated the least resistance in that quarter, though the reason he himself gave was that he intended to fight for the liberation of Mongolia from the foreign yoke.

Mongolia was then in the throes of internecine strife. In the West Dja, the mystic lama, had by his fanatical oratory aroused the population and completely detached the province of Kobdo from Mongolia. At Urga the Mongolians were desperately struggling to rid themselves of Russian and Chinese influence, while, on the other hand, the Russians and Chinese between themselves were engaged in a fierce conflict for mastery. The situation was therefore as favourable as it well could be for Ungern-Sternberg's Mongolian adventure, aided as he was by an atmosphere that made the use of patriotic slogans effective.

Ungern-Sternberg was not slow in exploiting the

credulity of the masses. He made speeches to the inhabitants of the frontier villages, declaring that he had come to the country in order to liberate it and drive out all foreigners, and calling upon the people to join him as a patriotic duty. He also promised again and again that once the liberation of the Mongolian people were accomplished he would organise a mighty Mongolian army, lead it into China, and after restoring the Emperor to his throne, attack Europe with the combined Sino-Mongolian army and "wipe out the revolution-mongers among the white races."

That was how Ungern-Sternberg advanced farther and farther into the country until, in November, 1920, his hordes stood before the Mongolian capital. His surprise attack on Urga and his ignominious defeat I have already mentioned. After that debacle the Baron collected his scattered forces in the Cecen District, east of Urga, and marched south, making speeches as he went. Then, by a surprise manœuvre, he placed himself astride the Urga-Pekin road in the valley of the Kerulen River, and dug himself in there. The Mongolians' enthusiasm for the "liberator" had by now cooled down, for Ungern expected them, in return for his promises, to feed his army, and if the process did not go smoothly enough the soldiers resorted to looting.

The cutting off of the important highway made it impossible for the Chinese in Urga to obtain reinforcements and supplies from Peking, but in spite of this, and the fact that their equipment was out of date, the defenders of Urga, after their first defeat of Ungern,

became careless and it did not even occur to them that the Baron might be seriously contemplating another attack. That was why, on the night of January 19, 1921, Ungern-Sternberg was able to cross the passes of Bogdo-Ul from the south and launch a successful surprise attack on the totally unprepared Chinese army.

Part of the Chinese troops fled towards the north, while the other part, consisting of 3,000 men, made for the south. These were pursued by Ungern-Sternberg's troops and cut down to the last man. Later, when I visited the district, in the region of Chorin-Chure, the bones of these unfortunates still lay scattered in the fields.

After his victory Ungern-Sternberg established himself in Urga, inaugurating a reign of the blackest terror. Mass murders were the order of the day and many of them were committed, or at least witnessed by Ungern-Sternberg himself. Ossendovski, who goes out of his way to defend him, attributes all these horrors not to Ungern-Sternberg but to Colonel Sepailov, whom he appointed military governor of the city. Ossendovski in his book also refers to a mysterious prophecy which prevented Ungern-Sternberg from dismissing Sepailov. There is, however, unassailable proof that Ungern-Sternberg committed a number of murders with his own hands and witnessed the most abominable and beastly killings and pogroms. Those unfortunate Jews who had fled to Mongolia from the Russian pogroms, or those Russians who, owing to their social position, had left Red Russia and settled in Urga, were certainly

not Chinamen and had no part in the military operations against the Baron, yet they practically all fell victims to his method of "warfare," not to speak of the many Mongolians who were butchered by his orders.

A baker's Jewish errand boy was, on Ungern-Sternberg's instructions, baked alive in his master's oven. I had known the boy during my first stay at Urga. He was a harmless, industrious, obliging lad, taking no interest in anything outside his work. He knew nothing about politics and could certainly not be suspected of Bolshevik tendencies.

On another occasion Ungern-Sternberg hanged a woman with his own hands because she was alleged to have stolen some silk. He stood for some minutes in front of the suspended, writhing creature and with an evil light in his eyes gave himself up to the enjoyment of her death agony.

But the Baron was also "great" in his anger. There was a Tartar named Suleiman who became one of Ungern-Sternberg's contractors. Ungern-Sternberg thought that Suleiman's prices were too high and refused to pay, and when Suleiman insisted on his rights, the "liberator" ordered his soldiers to drive the Tartar up to the roof of his own house and to see that he froze to death there. The inhabitants of Urga were thus provided with the horrible show of a Tartar screaming with cold and dancing about like one demented on the top of his own house. It was no thanks to Ungern-Sternberg that Suleiman managed to escape during the night.

Another example of Ungern-Sternberg's savagery: One night the Baron's executioners broke into the house of an Urga Jew and dragged off his young son behind the broadcasting station on the outskirts of the city, where they shot him dead. The charge against the boy was that he was a Red spy, a wildly improbable and certainly unproved accusation. The following day the grief-stricken father called on Baron Ungern-Sternberg and appealed to him to allow the boy's body to be taken away for decent burial, a request which had been brutally refused by the soldiers. The Baron swore at the unfortunate man and said he would not be bothered with a dirty Jew boy, dead or alive. The old man, half demented by his tragic experience and the Baron's brutal manner, bounded up to him with raised fists. The Baron's revenge was worthy of his reputation. He had the father arrested and locked into a box, in the side of which a round hole was cut. The old man's hand was pulled out through the hole and secured, so that he was unable to pull it back. Then, in the bitter cold, Ungern's soldiers poured water on the prisoner's hand until it froze, when, with a single blow from a stick, the frozen hand was broken off like a piece of glass. In order to prevent the tortured old man from dying, warmed-up pillows were stuffed into the box round him. Ungern-Sternberg's soldiers wanted to make sure that their victim should feel every stab of pain caused by their bestial treatment.

Not a day passed without fresh atrocities, and Ungern-Sternberg's White Army spared no one,

murdering women and children with the same callous indifference as men.

One night—to quote only one more example—they butchered every member of a Jewish family named Scheinemann, who had fled to Urga from a pogrom some years before, all except a young baby, whom his Mongolian nurse succeeded in stealing out of the house. She took the child to a Russian Orthodox priest who, at her request, quickly baptized him. But Ungern-Sternberg’s men got wind of the nurse’s ruse and sought her out. When the priest informed them that the child was now a Christian and that they must not touch it, they dragged off the nurse and murdered her.

The Mongolians fared little better than the Jews, for any Mongolian who was suspected of possessing a considerable amount of money was charged with being a “Red spy” and executed. The money was then “confiscated.”

The *Bogdo Gegen*, or Grand Lama, who, before Ungern-Sternberg’s first attack on Urga, harboured a secret sympathy for him and believed in his promises against the Chinese, was now also terrified of the “liberator” and instructed the lamas to hide the treasures of the Buddhist temples.

Meanwhile, Djamsaramo, the leader of the Mongolian Independence movement, who had escaped from Urga, went with a deputation of Mongolians to Russia, in an attempt to prevent the Reds from invading Mongolia on the pretext of a war against Ungern-Sternberg. Djamsaramo knew that Ungern-

Sternberg's days were numbered and that the reign of terror was bound to collapse of itself. He was afraid that if the Russian Red Army entered his country they might never leave it.

* * * *

Ungern-Sternberg's easy victory at Urga had gone to his head and he decided to extend his military operations to Russia. He increased his army by persuading—by means ranging from patriotic proclamations to brute force—more Russians and Mongolians to join him. He preached a crusade, in which, he said, it was the duty of every White Russian, and every Mongolian, to join, for civilisation must be saved by crushing the Reds and restoring Tsarist rule in Russia and wiping out the revolutionary elements in the rest of Europe. His recruiting campaign over, Ungern-Sternberg led his hordes northwards on the Urga-Troiskosavsk road, with the intention of cutting the railway line between Irkutsk and Eastern China, which would render it difficult for the Russians to bring up supplies and reserves, and make it easy for him to occupy the country lying to the east of the railway.

Ungern-Sternberg's insane venture made an end of my peaceful existence at Troiskosavsk. I was then living with my wife and her family in a villa outside the town. One night we were awakened from our sleep by the sound of firing and the distant din of

troops on the move. A breathless messenger from Troiskosavsk informed us that Ungern-Sternberg had arrived. The whole town was in a panic and the inhabitants were trying to escape in all directions.

However, before we had time to take it all in, the villa was surrounded by a company of Red soldiers, and my father-in-law was politely requested by an officer to accompany him. To this day I do not understand the whys and wherefores of my father-in-law's arrest, but I gathered at the time that he was being taken as a hostage. The following day I decided to go to Verchne Udinsk, then the headquarters of the Reds, in order to secure my father-in-law's release.

While I was away the battle between Ungern-Sternberg and the Reds took place on the southern shore of Lake Baikal, by the Selenga river, and the Baron's hordes were completely routed. The Baron himself barely managed to escape with his skin, a lone fugitive from the scene of his defeat. On June 6, 1921, a brigade of Reds entered Urga.

Ungern-Sternberg, hiding by day and travelling by night, made his way to the west. One night he was discovered and recognised by a Mongolian, who arrested the "liberator" and took him to Urga in chains. By that time the Mongolian National Government was already in the saddle, and towards the end of June they surrendered Ungern-Sternberg to the Soviet Government. The Baron was taken under a strong escort to Troiskosavsk and thence to Verchne Udinsk. I do not know what happened to him afterwards. According to some reports he was shot by the Reds,

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but there were also rumours to the effect that he was allowed to join the Red Army.

But his name still lives in the memory of the Mongolian people as a synonym of bestial cruelty.

DEAD FED TO THE DOGS

THE next radical change in my life was indirectly due to the Washington Conference, which strengthened the hands of the Soviet Government to such an extent that they were able to annex without much ado the territories north of Mongolia which were up till then known as the Far Eastern Republic. These territories included Troiskosavsk, and as the inauguration of Russian rule meant the abolition of private enterprise, my chances of earning a living were considerably diminished, and I was forced to seek fresh fields and pastures new. I decided to return to Mongolia, where conditions had meanwhile considerably improved, with a National Government in power and law and order re-established after the upheavals caused by Ungern-Sternberg. In addition, my path was made easy by the fact that my father-in-law owned a fur business in a Mongolian village named Belchir, some seventy-five miles from Troiskosavsk, and so, accompanied by the blessings of my newly-acquired family, I made my way thither. My wife was to follow me when I had made good in Belchir.

Belchir, though situated in Mongolia, was a Russian settlement from the time of the first Tsarist

protectorate. It occupied a magnificent site at the foot of the Kente Mountains, on the bank of the Kudara river, which is lined with rich gold-mines, while the opposite slope of the mountains as far as Dzumodo is so rich in gold that the metal may be panned from the soil at any point.

In addition, the country round Belchir—which then consisted of about thirty houses—is rich in fur-bearing animals. Some fifteen miles from the settlement there begins an impenetrable forest running eastward for seven hundred miles and this forest, along the whole length and width of it, swarms with grey squirrel, wolf, sable, deer, wild pig, and musk deer. Apart from that, the forest was full of ginger root, which the Chinese buy at good prices by the ton for medicinal purposes. In the summer the ground is covered with a thick layer of cedar cobs. The settlers of Belchir used to carry them away in sackfuls and made oil from them as the principal product; the secondary product was cedar milk, an excellent beverage made by soaking the crushed husks of the cedar cob in water. The region also comprised vast tracts of land eminently suitable for agriculture.

But the inhabitants of Belchir did not bother about sowing and reaping. At the beginning of winter they loaded their horses or mules with tea, sugar biscuits and home-made gunpowder and lead shot and moved out into the snow-covered mountains. There the various family or friendly groups built themselves refuges where they stored their food and hunting

materials, after which the beasts of burden were sent back to Belchir and the hunting season began in real earnest. The hunters fitted snow-shoes to their top-boots, to prevent them from sinking in the yards-deep snow. The actual hunting was "as easy as falling off a log," for the forest was full of wild animals, and it was almost sufficient to fire a gun in order to bag something worth while.

Fur prices were not particularly high. A grey squirrel skin fetched about four shillings, but an individual hunter could bag five or six or even ten grey squirrels per day throughout the winter, and that amounted to something in terms of money.

Towards Christmas the caravans entered upon the return journey from the mountains and the furs bagged during the winter were transported to Belchir. I was one of those who purchased these skins, but the competition for them was tremendous, as practically every one of the thirty houses of the settlement harboured a fur dealer or a co-operative, and the methods employed by my competitors were not always of the gentlest. I was a new man in Belchir and in spite of the fact that I was managing an old-established business—my father-in-law's—the rest of the inhabitants looked askance upon me and did everything in their power to thwart me. Belchir was a veritable Eldorado and I could have earned a living there in many other ways than by fur-trading, but I realised that the antagonism of my neighbours—Russians, Chinese and Mongolians—was due to their determination not to allow any "foreigner" to help

himself out of the plenty that the district provided, and so I decided to move on.

Accordingly, I sent a letter to my wife in Troiskosavsk, informing her that I was leaving Belchir and would probably go to China, where, if I could not obtain more suitable work, I might take a job as a motor-driver. Just then the manager of the Kudara gold-mines happened to be in Belchir, on his way home, and I set off with him towards Dzumodo, his headquarters. My entire fortune consisted of a tolerably good mare, a Winchester rifle and some effects which filled a couple of saddle-bags. From Dzumodo I was to ride on to Urga and thence to Kalgan.

We reached Dzumodo in the evening. The mine manager invited me to stay the night, and during supper he mentioned to me that several members of the Russian Geographical Society—the Kozlov Expedition—were at Cuzukte, a short distance from Dzumodo, digging for ancient tombs. My host was apparently indifferent to archæology, for when I inquired what tombs Kozlov was working on, all he could say was that they were “very ancient.”

“However,” he added, “if you are interested I can take you to Cuzukte to-morrow. I’m going to do some hunting there.”

In the morning we walked to Cuzukte in knee-deep snow. The Cuzukte Mountain is only a few hundred feet high, yet we were completely exhausted by the time we reached the abandoned mine buildings at the summit. In one hut we came upon three young

men, Kodratiev, Sibukov and another whose name I do not remember. They were members of the Kozlov Expedition and were considerably surprised when I told them that I came to see whether they had found anything of archæological interest.

The five of us went out to the site of the excavations. There were three tombs being worked, but although the workmen had already reached a depth of some twenty-one feet, there was as yet no trace of the actual burial chamber. The tombs could be located without difficulty and with the utmost certainty, as they were all marked by a mound with a crater-like depression at the top. The mound was formed when, some three thousand years ago, the tombs were filled in, partly because the red-pine burial chamber took up some of the space in the hole dug for the purpose, and partly for the normal reason that the replaced earth was loose. In the course of time the mound of loose earth settled to a normal consistency, sinking in the centre, where it rested on a loose filling, and retaining some of its height at the outer rim, where it was supported by firm soil. That the mound in its loose condition was not blown away by storms or its crater filled in with sand is due to the fact that the tombs were protected by the surrounding forest.

The Kozlov Expedition continued the excavations in this territory until the end of the following summer. In the meantime I had another occasion to visit the district and it was then, for the first time, that I saw some completely open tombs, as well as their contents. There was in each tomb a double chamber built from

logs of red pine. The first chamber contained the coffin, while the second was filled with the dead man's treasures and personal effects. The circular top aperture of the tomb was closed with a heavy flat stone, which lay at a depth of from twenty-four to twenty-seven feet.

The Expedition, unfortunately, did not treat the objects found in the tombs with any amount of care. It was, in fact, not a scientific but rather a gold-digging expedition. The coffins were hacked to pieces, the wooden statuettes and utensils, wonderfully preserved for three thousand years, carelessly smashed, and priceless carpets cut into ribbons. All the Expedition wanted was the gold which every tomb contained; the rest did not matter to them. Most of the objects in gold were smuggled out of Mongolia by Kozlov's men, and only a small proportion of them was handed over to the National Government. These are preserved at the museum in Urga.

It is difficult to understand how perishable objects like wood, carpets and the like could remain in such a perfect state of preservation for thirty centuries. In one of the Hun tombs Kozlov found a carpet with a complete picture of two mounted hunters chasing a golden stag woven into it. This carpet was of immense interest to me, because it proved that the beautiful legend about the origin of the Hun and Magyar races was already well known thirty centuries ago. The two hunters obviously represented Hun and Magyar, the two young warriors who—so the ancient story goes—were lured by a golden stag to a great distance from

their home where, in a forest clearing, they came upon a group of dancing girls, of whom they captured and married two. The two girls, who were the daughters of a king, became the mothers of the world-conquering Huns and the Magyars who, under Arpad, occupied the plain between the Danube and the Theiss in the tenth century.

I do not know what happened to this precious carpet. I was not in a position to make an offer for it, and it is not improbable that it shared the fate of many of the other finds made by the Kozlov Expedition that had no intrinsic value.

After a few days' stay at Dzumodo, of which I had so many unpleasant memories from my previous visit, I went on alone towards Urga.

* * * *

I need not go into the details of my journey. It was a long series of hardships and privations, such as I have already recounted in connection with my previous journeys and, in any case, I was by this time used to them.

One day, after many days and nights spent in the saddle, I again found myself looking down upon the golden roofs and vast temple of the Ganden Monastery. I was now within a short distance of Urga and I ought to have felt glad, but gloomy thoughts as to the immediate future overshadowed any elation that the nearness of my goal might have evoked. It was most unlikely that Vladimirov was still in Urga, and even if he were I had no reason to be certain that he

would put me up. I could think of no one else in the capital to turn to.

A hearty "*Guten Tag!*" startled me out of my depression. It was Arnold Gnadenberg, a Baltic German whom I had met in Belchir. He was riding in the opposite direction to mine, and reining in his horse he held out a glad hand to me. Needless to say, I was overjoyed at his opportune appearance. At least he was someone I knew. But when he told me that he was living in Urga and invited me to stay with him, my depression of a few moments ago seemed a thing of the distant past.

Gnadenberg turned his horse round and rode back with me towards Urga. On the way he told me that there was peace and quiet in the capital and that the National Government had just decided to erect an electric power works.

"That reminds me," said my companion. "You're an electrical engineer, aren't you? Why not have a go at it?"

I assured my friend that I was quite capable of performing the work, having already built a power station in Russia.

"Splendid," said Gnadenberg. "Dorzhi Merin, the Minister of Finance, is a friend of mine. I'll tell him about you. They're in a fix about finding a suitable man for the job."

My spirits rose at a bound and I felt so happy that I could have danced with joy. In an instant all the troubles of the past few days were forgotten. We rode along chatting and joking, and almost before we

noticed it we were close to the fences of the Ganden Monastery. The mountain at this point slopes gently into the valley and the monastery buildings now gleamed above us. It was a lovely, fantastic, exhilarating scene—above us, masses of gilt roofs set against the white snow and the blue sky, and in the distance below, the opalescent glow of the frozen Tola river and teeming throngs picturesquely dressed in all the colours of the rainbow. I was strangely moved and was slipping into a sentimental reverie when, all of a sudden, I heard the wild barking of dogs rising from the valley. Looking down, I saw a red-robed man rolling on the ground, with five or six large dogs savagely tearing at his flesh.

“Gnadenberg!” I exclaimed, sick with horror. “Come along, we must save the man.”

“Steady, old man,” replied Gnadenberg with a smile. “The fellow has been dead a long time.”

Then, when he saw my puzzled frown, he hurriedly added:

“Didn’t you know that it’s the custom here to feed the dead to the dogs?”

Gnadenberg was perfectly right. That I should not have heard of this gruesome Mongolian custom before is perhaps not surprising, in view of my many occupations and preoccupations during my stay in the country. Now, however, I was anxious to learn the details. Gnadenberg told me all he knew, but the following account is based mainly on my subsequent investigations and attendances at Mongolian funerals.

There are three kinds of “burials” in Mongolia,

one for the Grand Lamas, another for lamas of high rank, and a third for the people.

When the *Bogdo Gegen* dies his body is rubbed with an alcoholic mixture until the flesh becomes completely desiccated, after which it is gilt over from head to foot by a secret process known only to a few lamas, so that the body looks like a statue of solid gold. This "statue" is then erected in one of the temples.

Lamas of high rank are buried in the ground, like ordinary mortals in Europe, a characteristic memorial—called *suburga* in Mongolian—being raised above their graves.

All the rest of the population is after death thrown to the dogs. These animals live in a wild state in the "cemeteries" outside the towns, and sometimes even attack living persons who happen to pass their way, so that it is very dangerous to go near one of these "cemeteries" unarmed.

The procedure at funerals is as follows.

When a Mongolian dies his family build a small tent near the ordinary dwelling tent and after wrapping the body in red silk place it on the floor of the new structure. In front of the "death-tent," on each side of the entrance, a stick hung with a coloured *chadak* is stuck into the ground. The final rites are performed by lamas, whose co-operation, according to the Buddhist faith, is indispensable, since none but a lama can act as an intermediary between the spirit of the departed and the higher spirits, which determine the number of reincarnations through which the departed spirit must pass before it reaches Nirvana.

The number, as well as the rank of the lamas invited by the family, depends on the latter's position and means, and sometimes on the amount the family wants to spend on the funeral. In the case of lamas of high rank a funeral may cost from ten to fifteen horses; lamas of low rank officiate in return for one or two sheep or some other trifling fee. Generally, however, the bereaved family invite lamas who are related to them, which works out more or less in the same way, rich families having lamas of high rank in the priesthood, while lamas of humble rank mostly belong to poor families.

In addition to the lamas, the deceased's friends are also invited. The lamas appear in ceremonial robes, with tall mitres decorated with tiny death's heads carved from bone, and carrying in their hands drums made of human skin and flutes carved from human shin-bones. The guests come in their gala costumes, the women wearing the typical high Mongolian head-dress. The entire company sit down on the ground in front of the "death-tent" and the lamas begin to pray, first in a low murmur, then louder and louder, accompanied by the rolling of the drums and the screeching of the flutes, symbols of death which serve as a warning to the living. "You too will die," is the message of the gruesome musical instruments; "your bodies are perishable like this drum and flute. Only the spirit survives, soaring forth from its sheath of dust like the music from these instruments."

"*Om, om, om. . .*" The voices of the lamas rise to a wild scream, the rolling of the drums becomes

more thunderous, the weird shriek of the flutes more ear-splitting, the lamas sway their bodies faster and faster to the rhythm of the music, then suddenly they leap to their feet and, placing their palms on their brows, bow several times.

The ceremony proper is now over. The body is placed on a *terghe*, or cart, and the procession starts for the valley of death. A few hundred yards from the haunt of the dogs the procession halts; only the *terghe*, accompanied by an armed man, goes on, right into the "cemetery," the site of which is clearly marked by the scattered bones of earlier arrivals. The body is lifted down from the *terghe* and placed on the ground. Then the vehicle turns back. The hungry dogs fall upon the body immediately after the departure of the *terghe*, and within a quarter of an hour there is a fresh skeleton, and one more grinning skull in the valley of death.

The procession, together with the *terghe*, returns to the "death-tent," where the vehicle is consigned to the flames, for it is believed that to use a funeral cart for any other purpose would bring disaster upon the family.



FUNERAL CEREMONY—
THE LAMA'S DEATH
DANCE

The Drum in his right
hand is of Human
Skin, and the Flute
in his left of Human
Bone



END OF THE FUNERAL CEREMONY

The Lama's Hat is decorated with Death's Heads carved
in Bone



SILBA MONASTERY
(Tibetan Style Temple)



DZUN CHURE MONASTERY
(Chinese Style Temple)

XXX

DJA LAMA

ARRIVED at Urga, Gnadenberg took me to his house and entertained me right royally for many days. I had ample opportunity of finding out what had happened in Urga during my long absence. There were many important changes. The National Government had even succeeded in disposing of Dja Lama, the fanatic whom I have already mentioned.

Dja Lama was a Kalmuk. During the Tsarist regime he had been banished to Siberia for having, by his mysterious conduct, aroused the Kalmuk tribes living in Siberia and Mongolia to revolt, but he managed to escape and transferred the scene of his activities to the region of Kobdo, in Mongolia. Soon he became a legendary figure in the eyes of the people. He was regarded as a magician, for he wielded a tremendous hypnotic power and was able to hypnotise not only individuals but whole crowds into seeing what he wanted them to see. There were many stories current about him among the people. According to one of them, Dja Lama in the course of his escape from Siberia was recognised and pursued by a troop of Cossacks. Dja was driven to the shore of Lake Sur Nor. There was a vast expanse of water in front of him, and the Cossacks behind him. The inhabitants

of a small nomad encampment watched with bated breath, expecting to see Dja butchered by the Cossacks at any moment. Suddenly they were amazed to see that the Cossacks had changed their direction, and instead of riding towards Dja, who was calmly standing within a few yards of them, were galloping away to the other side of the lake.

"There he is!" bawled the Cossacks. "There he is!" But "there" meant a different point to each of the Cossacks and they parted and rode in different directions. Then they met again and fell upon one another with their long lances, stabbing and cursing and *killing one another*.

Dja Lama stood on the other side, fixedly gazing across to them. Each of the Cossacks apparently thought that he was killing Dja!

It is easy to imagine the influence such a man was able to exercise on the common people. It was said that he was the reincarnation of Amursan, the mighty Mongolian ruler who, many centuries ago, united the Mongolians living in Russia and of whom it was believed that one of his reincarnations would once more unite the entire Mongol race in a single great empire and restore the power of Djenghis Khan to his people.

In 1918 Dja established an independent province in the region of Kobdo, appointing himself its king, and refusing to recognise any authority besides his own. Sometimes, if he was so minded, he even defied the orders of the *Bogdo Gegen*. Nor was he gentle in his methods when it came to the execution of his

plans. Anyone who dared oppose him was ruthlessly removed. The people became blind tools in the hands of the mysterious Kalmuk, whom they dreaded with a superstitious fear.

A whole superstitious saga developed around him. The people came to believe that he belonged to the mysterious sect of the "Red Lamas," who before their initiation must learn the ancient divine magic of the Tantaros in the Monastery of Eternal Life. According to legend the lamas living in the Monastery of Eternal Life never die, and are even able to resist gravitation and fly at will without mechanical aids. This mysterious monastery—so the common people believe—is somewhere in the Himalayas, at some place that is inaccessible to ordinary mortals and open only to certain privileged reincarnations, men whose bodies are animated by some great spirit of the past and who are predestined to acquire the magic power. Those who find the way to the Monastery of Eternal Life return as the possessors of great secrets and a super-human power. The "initiated," if they happen to meet out in the world, recognise one another by a peculiar method of severing the tendons of animals at meals. This sign cannot be observed by ordinary mortals.

Surrounded by such legends Dja had no difficulty in consolidating and increasing his power in the province of Kobdo. He regarded himself as greater than the *Bogdo Gegen*, took no heed of the latter's orders except when he chose to do so, and busily prepared for the "great reckoning" with the foreigners who had settled all over Mongolia. Dja Lama kept

turning up in many places all over Mongolia, his trail marked by Russians and Chinamen with slit throats. It was practically impossible for any individual to resist him, for Dja's overwhelming hypnotic power was sufficient to strike the weapon of defence from the hands of his intended victims. It was impossible to arrest him, impossible to kill him, and the people trusted, worshipped and feared him.

The Mongolian National Government upon its formation sent him a message calling upon him to submit to the authority of Mongolia's national will. The Government's emissaries never returned and it was only later that an *urton* rider reported what happened to them at Kobdo.

Dja Lama when he heard the Government's message burst into laughter, then looked the emissaries angrily up and down. They stood rigid, unable to move. Dja drew a long knife, went up to each man in turn and with a deft stroke cut out his heart. That is how sheep are killed in Mongolia, and that was how Dja dealt with the Government's deputation.

After this no one dared to approach the monster. Nevertheless, alarming reports began to arrive daily from Kobdo that Dja Lama was now preparing for war, this time against the National Government, of which he did not approve. Then Baldan Dorzhe, commander of the Mongolian State police, reported to the Prime Minister and undertook personally to render Dja Lama harmless. Naturally, his offer was gladly accepted and Baldan Dorzhe immediately left for Kobdo. He knew of Dja Lama's terrible

hypnotic power and he therefore travelled in the greatest secrecy and heavily disguised.

Once in Kobdo, Baldan Dorzhe had no difficulty in finding out where Dja lived. One night he managed to crawl up to the entrance of Dja's tent and raising himself to his knees immediately fired his revolver. He knew that if he delayed he would fall under the monster's hypnotic spell. But luck was with him and his first shot was sufficient to end Dja's evil power for ever.

The same night an *urton* rider with a leather bag tied to his saddle left for Urga. The bag contained Dja's head, sent with Baldan Dorzhe's compliments to the National Government.

With Dja's death the unity of Mongolia was assured, for Kobdo immediately recognised the Government. Baldan Dorzhe was elected to Parliament, but a few years later he retired from politics because he thought that the composition of Parliament was too radical.

THE GRAND LAMA RECOGNISES THE REVOLUTION

THE business of the power works was soon settled. I was summoned before Dorzhi Merin, the Minister of Finance, to whom my excellent German friend had already spoken on my behalf. The Minister fired at me a hundred questions in rapid succession as to where and when I had built a power works, where I had been up till then, why I came to Mongolia, and so on. I did my best to satisfy him, but his last question was something of a poser. Looking at me searchingly, he asked:

“Can you prove that you are capable of constructing a power works?”

“Mr. Merin,” I replied as coolly as I could, “short of actually attempting such a construction it is impossible to prove that. But give me a month in which to prepare plans and an estimate, and pay me a hundred *lan* (about £8 at par) for my trouble if you approve of the plans, in which case you will, of course, also entrust me with the work. If you don’t like my plans, I get nothing.”

Dorzhi Merin thought that that was reasonable, and instructed me to start on the plans. I set to work with tremendous enthusiasm and at the end of a month I submitted to the Minister my drawings and

calculations. We went through them together, and it soon became obvious to me from his questions that the good man knew nothing at all about electricity, let alone the construction of a power works, and I therefore endeavoured to make my replies sound as technical as possible. The Minister did not understand them, but he was visibly impressed, and I was immediately commissioned to carry out the work.

Within a few months the power works was completed, partly with machinery already available at Urga and partly with equipment imported from abroad. To-day practically every house in Urga has electric lighting. The Government provides the external wiring free of charge and internal wiring against payment of the actual labour costs involved in carrying the wires from the street to the points in the house.

During and after the construction of the power works I received a number of other commissions. Among others, I was awarded the contracts to build Mongolia's first Parliament and theatre, in a competition in which one of my rivals was a reputable architect named Afanazich Sergeievich Kotov. The Mongolian Government also commissioned me to build a number of other public buildings and at one time I was invited to lecture on Physics and Mechanics at the University of Urga. In 1928 I was commissioned to modernise the power works I had built, but this work was not completed while I was in Urga, as some important parts ordered from Europe did not arrive until very much later.

Thus, by a series of accidents and a considerable slice of luck, my "transit" through Mongolia lasted for nearly a decade.

These years were a period of rapid development in Mongolia. The transformation of Urga proceeded at a truly staggering rate. Almost daily, new colours and sounds were introduced into the life of this kaleidoscopically colourful and lively city. Cinemas were opened one after another and the Parliament building, between sittings, was also used as a theatre, for which purpose it had been partly designed when it was built. The theatrical programme consisted mainly of Mongolian historical plays, particularly of the period of Djenghis Khan, and the Parliament-theatre was always thronged to the doors with grateful audiences. In addition to cinemas and a theatre, there were also a number of dance-halls, and post-war Mongolia took to dancing with the same careless abandon as post-war Europe. The Government not only established a regular omnibus service in the streets of Urga but also built an airport in the capital, with direct services to and from the Siberian Railway.

During the first few days of the operation of the air line the Mongolians gazed up with wonderment at the *tumor peh*—"steel bird"—as it floated past above them in the heavens, but later they became used to aeroplanes and did not even bother to look up at them.

Mongolia has no railways of any kind, but in addition to its air line, regular passenger and goods services are maintained by motor coach on certain

routes, but mainly from Troiskosavsk to Pekin, across the Gobi Desert.

And the Mongolians, 60 per cent of whom are completely illiterate—simple, cheerful, hospitable children of the steppe, who for that very reason were for a long time thoroughly exploited by the more shrewd and less honest foreigner—receive with childish pleasure everything that is new to them, walking round it and—if they can get close enough—even licking it. Yet when the purpose and operation of a piece of machinery are explained to them, they grasp the lesson with marvellous speed. They have learned to drive cars in “less than no time,” so to speak, and some of them are even efficient aeroplane pilots. By 1928 the Mongolians ceased to wonder at cars and aeroplanes and saw nothing extraordinary in the modern omnibuses circulating in a city filled with fantastically dressed lamas, a mixed population attired in bright silks of all colours and camel caravans that differed in nothing from the caravans of ten centuries ago; or in fast aeroplanes flying at prodigious speeds over monasteries crammed with weird instruments for driving out devils from the bodies of the “possessed.” Pious pilgrims who crawl to the monasteries on their bellies return home of an evening and turn on the electric light. In one wing of the public hospital in Urga, which is equipped with all the latest medical appliances, the lama doctors still continue to treat the sick with magic and herbs.

Mongolia's period of transition is not yet over and the struggle between past and present, between

progress and tradition, is still proceeding. However, it is safe to predict that the old traditions—including the tradition of honesty—will never be entirely abandoned in Mongolia.

With regard to the political organisation of Mongolia the National Government has introduced some radical changes. Before its advent, Mongolia's spiritual and temporal ruler was the *Bogdo Gegen*—so called in his religious capacity. As temporal head of Mongolia he was called *Bogdo Khan*. The country was divided into four *eimacs*, or counties, and one border province. The *eimacs* were ruled by the Khans, who were direct descendants of Djenghis Khan, while the border province, which was nearest to Russia, and was called *Charaul*—the Watch—was administered by a governor appointed by the *Bogdo Gegen*. Later, when the new government seized power, the *Bogdo Khan* was allowed to retain his title, but was deprived of all executive power. In his capacity as *Bogdo Gegen*, or Grand Lama, the Government did not interfere with his religious authority. The four Khans, as well as the governor of the Border Province, resigned their positions in favour of officials appointed by the Government. One of the Khans—Cecen—signified his approval of the aims of the Revolution by resigning before he was called upon to do so. He was elected to Parliament by a unanimous vote and remained a deputy for some years, until one day he retired to a monastery.

The last *Bogdo Gegen* died on May 26, 1924. As I have already mentioned, the Government had dug

up an old legend according to which the spirit of the first *Bogdo Gegen* had to pass through eight reincarnations on earth, and as the *Bogdo Gegen* who died in 1924 was, according to theological calculations, the eighth reincarnation, the Government refrained from searching for a ninth reincarnation, thereby abolishing the office of Grand Lama.

The Mongolian Constitution was framed on the most up-to-date lines. Even during the *Bogdo's* lifetime a publicity campaign in favour of transition to a republican form of government was carried on, and this work was greatly facilitated by the *Bogdo's* unpopularity among the common people, dating from the time when, in the year 1912, he married and had himself crowned, together with his wife. The first anniversary celebrations of the Revolution already clearly showed what was to come.

The celebrations, which were held with great pomp, took place on August 9, 1922. At one o'clock in the afternoon a gorgeous coach drew up in front of the *Bogdo Gegen's* official residence. In it sat the *Bogdo Gegen* and his wife, Eche Dagini. The *Bogdo* was dressed not in his priestly robes but in a gold-embroidered national costume decorated with priceless jewels—on this day he was not the Grand Lama but the temporal, even though only nominal, ruler of Mongolia. Behind the coach walked a solemn procession of Ministers, State Secretaries and other State officials, all wearing long robes of brocade silk and richly embroidered caps. The majority of them had pigtails.

As the coach came to a halt the *Bogdo's* body-guards, wearing resplendent gala uniforms, spread a long yellow silk carpet from the steps of the vehicle to the entrance of the temple which formed part of the *Bogdo's* residence. The *Bogdo* then alighted, helped down Eche Dagini with a courtly gesture, and linking arms with her walked towards the temple, preceded by a few pages carrying lighted candles, and followed by the procession of State officials. The *Bogdo* and his wife sat down on two separate thrones, whereupon the entire company inclined their heads before them three times in succession. The Prime Minister read the Government's message from a scroll, which he then handed to the *Bogdo*. The *Bogdo*, with a perfectly immobile face, accepted the scroll and laid it down beside him on the seat of the throne. With the same statuesque, almost petrified immobility he accepted the presents with which each member of the Government, as well as the lesser dignitaries present, came to present him at the close of the ceremony.

An uninitiated spectator might have concluded that the Grand Lama, whose predecessors were always regarded with almost ecstatic awe, was receiving the homage of loving and loyal subjects, but the *Bogdo* himself, as well as the men who filled the temple, knew perfectly well that the gathering was in honour of the first anniversary of the Revolution, which had reduced the *Bogdo Khan's* office to a mere title. The *Bogdo* had ceased to be the superhuman, mystic being of the ancient superstition. He was nothing but a man, an ordinary mortal, and he was there to learn, even

though only in a veiled form, that those who were addressing him believed that the Mongolian people was more important than any saint and that the only reincarnation that would be respected in future would be the immortal soul of a reborn nation.

Two years later the *Bogdo* was dead and the Mongolian Republic was born.

THE MONGOLIAN CONSTITUTION

THE Mongolian Parliament held its first sitting on November 8, 1924. There were 77 deputies, elected by universal secret suffrage. Six of the deputies belonged to the old nobility, 46 came from among the leaders of the national revolution, while 13 were Independents and six lamas represented religious interests. The remaining six deputies belonged to various minor parties.

Before and during the election the National—or Government—Party continued its propaganda in favour of a Republic and drafted a Constitution in that sense.

At the first meeting of Parliament (*Iche Churuldan*) Ceren Dorzhi, the Prime Minister, announced the programme of his party, gave an account of the Government's past activities and called upon the deputies to devote themselves to the service of the Mongolian people. He exhorted Parliament to bear in mind that the nation's moral and spiritual welfare was also in their keeping and that the Church must therefore be protected.

The deputies gave the Government a unanimous vote of thanks for the past services to the country, ratified their Pact of Friendship with Russia, then

proceeded to examine and pass the Draft Constitution.

The Mongolian Constitution is composed of fifty clauses. It sanctions the republican form of government and abolishes completely the temporal power of the *Bogdo Gegen* and the lamas. Executive power is wielded by the Parliament elected by the people through the instrumentality of the Government. Parliament—called in Mongolian *Iche Churuldan*, or Great Parliament—only meets on important national occasions and elects at its opening meeting the members of the *Baga Churuldan*, or Little Parliament.

The Little Parliament is composed of thirty members. Its task is to direct and supervise the Government's activities, remaining in permanent session and electing a Presidency of three members twice yearly. The Little Parliament must from time to time pass a vote of confidence or no confidence in the Government, as the case may be, even if no proposal to that effect is laid before it by other deputies or the electors. The Presidency has the right, between the sessions of the Little Parliament, to cancel the Government's orders or to delay their execution until the following session. The Presidency is further empowered to dismiss Ministers from their posts and to appoint others in their stead, so that the supreme power in the State is wielded by the three members of the Presidency. High officials of State are also appointed by the Presidency.

The Great Parliament is convened whenever at least a third of the Little Parliament or a certain number of the electors demand it.

The deputies of the Great Parliament are elected for one year. Their numbers are in proportion to the number of the electors.

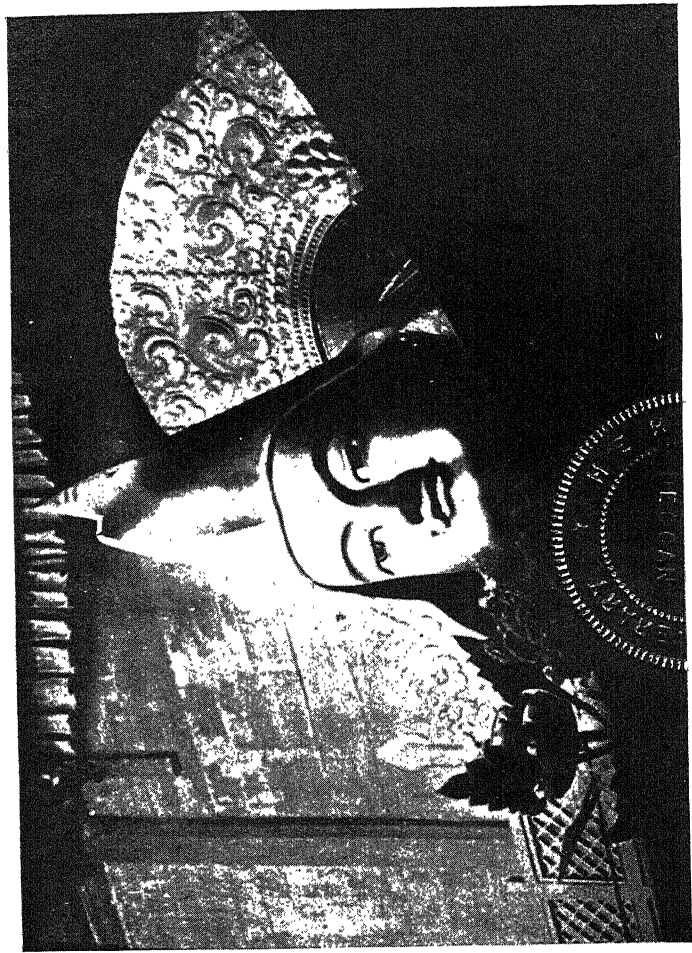
All land belongs to the nation.

Arrears of taxation or other public debts incurred by the population from no fault of their own are cancelled. In the old days, if a man failed to pay his taxes the Government could distrain not only on his own goods but also on those of his family, and even his tribe. The Constitution has changed this and individual responsibility now takes the place of collective responsibility in all matters.

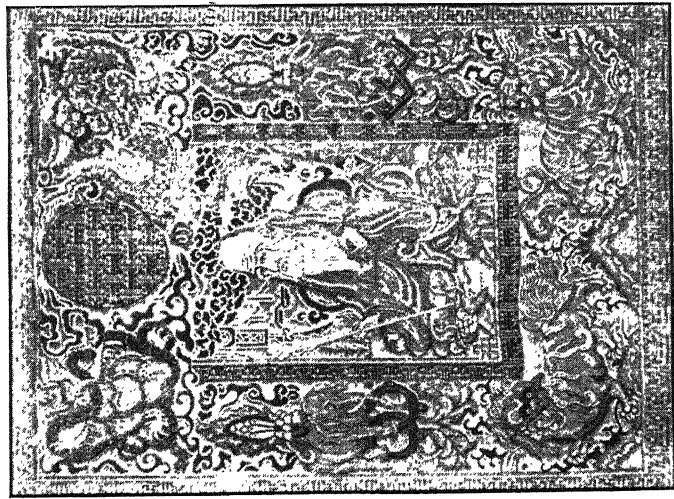
The Constitution abolishes the titles and privileges of the nobility, disestablishes the Church, declaring that religion is the individual's private affair, and introduces military conscription "for the defence of the Constitution."

It is clearly established in the Constitution that the inhabitants of Mongolia are free citizens, with complete freedom of speech and assembly. Everyone who works enjoys complete equality with the rest of the nation, without distinction of nationality, race or creed. In addition, every Mongolian is entitled to a free education; tuition is entirely free, even at the universities.

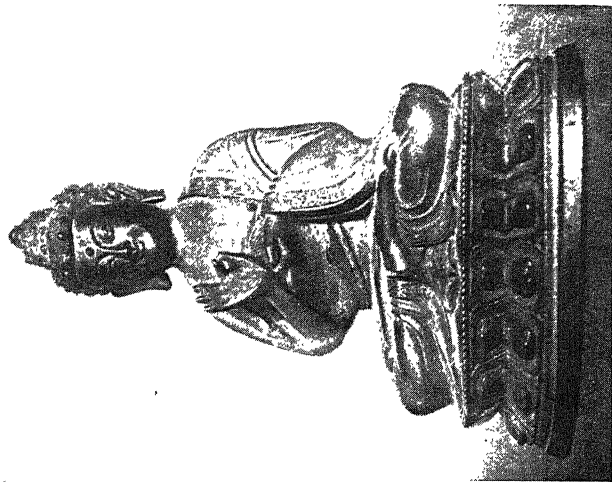
The Constitution grants the vote to all men and women over eighteen residing within the territory of the Mongolian Republic, provided he or she is capable of earning a living independently or—in the case of men—if in the service of the National Army. The vote is denied to those who live exclusively by the



HEAD OF NINETY-FOOT GILT MAIDERI STATUE AT THE GANDEN TEMPLE



WALL CARPET REPRESENTING
CAGAN DAVA (WHITE HERMIT)



BUDDHA

work of other persons, or exploit the work of others, or engage in usury, or belong to that part of the nobility who failed to resign their titles voluntarily, or to a religious order.

The Government bears full responsibility for State expenditure, and is the guardian of the Seal of State, which may be used for certifying certain official documents.

The Constitution prescribes the design of the Seal of State—Djenghis Khan's crest of a sun enclosed in a crescent moon topped with three jets of flame. The national flag is yellow.

The first Parliament also changed the name of the city of Urga, which was, in any case, but little known in Mongolia itself and was generally referred to as *Bogdo Chure*—Holy Monastery. Urga's new name is Ulan Bator Choto.

XXXIII

MYSTERIES

I HAD a Mongolian friend who had been a lama and still had connections among the inhabitants of the monasteries. One day he sought me out and asked me whether I wanted "to see something interesting to-night." He explained that there was a distinguished lama visiting the Silba Monastery who would that evening hold a ceremony of prophecy and exorcism on the terrace of the monastery temple. I had already heard of these ceremonies and myself witnessed an attempt by a Shaman to drive the "devil" out of a sick youth. But this promised to be an even more exciting event, as the Silba Monastery had one of the finest temples in Mongolia, the visiting lama was a great man, and his performance was to take place in the presence of an audience composed almost entirely of "experts." In addition, when he had done with the evil spirits the lama was going to reveal the secrets of the future. So, of course, I agreed to accompany my ex-lama friend.

He called for me in mid-afternoon and took me along to the monastery, where his influence and my position under the Government secured for me not only a seat on the temple terrace for the evening but also permission to inspect the temple itself. The

temple of the Silba Monastery is a magnificent example of the Tibetan style, with a flat, terraced roof, in contrast to the tapering roofs with turned-up corners of the Chinese style.

I spent the rest of the afternoon admiring the three gilt idols which face the entrance in every Buddhist temple. In front of them, on a low shelf, stood small bronze vessels filled with burning charcoal, from which rose the sickly smell of fragrant herbs. The "holy of holies," fronted by a large statue of the Buddha, was in a gallery over the three Buddhas in the body of the temple, but of course I was not allowed to enter that mysterious chamber, or even to climb the stairs leading to it.

From the temple my friend and I went round to the lamas' living quarters, simple Mongolian huts such as I had seen in the steppe. Meanwhile, the visiting lama on the roof of the temple had completed his preparations and by the time we climbed up the ceremony was already in progress. The great man began with an exhibition of exorcism which differed little from the ritual I have described in an earlier chapter. He wore the appropriate robe and had a large sword in his right hand. His wild gyrations in the dim light of a few open oil lamps looked weird but—to me—unimpressive. However, the sooth-saying part of his performance was a new experience to me, and therefore of greater interest.

The more distinguished lamas of the monastery sat on ornate cushions in a wide semi-circle in front of the visitor. Behind him the band made a chaotic

din on their various instruments, all of which were made of human skin or human bones. The lamas kept their gaze fixed on the prophet, who stood rigid and motionless, while the spectators in unison murmured the magic word, "*om . . . om.*" Standing in a secluded corner I watched the proceedings.

Suddenly the chief priest of the monastery rose, walked up to the prophet and hung a *chadak* round his neck. The prophet raised one end of the *chadak* and touched his forehead with it. A lama of low rank now handed him a battle-axe, and the prophet stiffened again, standing rigid with the sword in one hand and the battle-axe in the other. Then all the lamas in turn stepped up to him and hung coloured silk *chadaks* round his neck. The "orchestra" played on and the din of the flutes, drums and tambourines never ceased for a moment. The prophet's face was bathed in perspiration, probably from intense concentration. Suddenly he shook himself and leapt into a wild, writhing, gyrating dance. The dance lasted for several minutes, the dancer grunted and groaned with ecstasy, until, completely exhausted, he collapsed on the ground.

Now he began to prophesy. One by one the lamas walked up to him and posed questions concerning their own future or the future of the monastery. The dazed prophet replied in brief, unintelligible phrases, which the chief priest, who stood close by, rapidly translated into clear speech. The lamas listened to the prophet on their knees, with an expression of awe on their faces. When all the questions

had been answered the prophet recovered from his trance and the show was over.

* * * *

Whether the visitor's prophecies came true or not, I am of course unable to say. But, strange as this may sound, it is nevertheless a fact that some lamas can see into the future. I know this from personal experience, as well as from unimpeachable evidence I have gathered while in Mongolia. One of my informants was Cokto Badma Zhap, a Mongolian scientist and a man of the highest integrity. Badma Zhap, for many years before the war, was attached to the Tsarist court on a confidential mission on behalf of his country, and later became, in turn, Minister of Justice, Director of the Office of Works, and Governor of the Mongolian Co-operative at Urga. He was also a member of the American Historical Association and other scientific bodies. I mention all this in order to show that such a man could not have been a religious fanatic or a particularly credulous person, nor—in view of his high status as a scientist—a liar.

"It happened in Russia," said Badma Zhap, "among the Buriats living on the shore of Lake Baikal. There was a company of Cossacks stationed in one of the villages. One day the intendant's money-box disappeared and he reported the loss to the authorities. The self-important gendarmes made a few inquiries and when they found that they were not likely to catch the culprit they simply gave out that the money

was stolen by the Buriat inhabitants of the village. The Buriats, deeply offended in their honour, determined to do everything in their power to discover the thief. A meeting of their Elders was held and it was decided to consult a prophetic lama. The lama told them that the money would be found in a certain house of a certain street, walled into the western side of an oven. The Buriats thereupon called on the Russian company commander and asked for an escort, declaring that they had every reason to believe that the stolen money would be recovered. The money was found at the exact spot indicated by the lama. And the house was that of the intendant himself!

"The intendant was away at the time of the search, but when he heard of it he simply sent a couple of Cossacks for the lama and had him arrested. A few days later, however, the intendant was transferred to another garrison. But the loyal Buriats nevertheless had considerable difficulty in securing the lama's release."

Cokto Badma Zhap's next story of a prophetic lama was from his own personal experience.

"On one of my scientific expeditions," he said, "I travelled to Western Mongolia, in the region of Alasan, where there were no post offices and no telegraphs, so that I was unable to communicate with my parents, who were hundreds of miles away. I had reason to be worried about them, so, after much cogitation, I approached a prophetic lama living in a nearby monastery, and asked him whether he could tell me what my parents were doing at that moment.

The lama called two young boys into his tent, murmured a prayer, then shouted at the children: 'What do you see?' The boys in broken sentences explained that they saw the house of my parents and described in great detail the appearance of the court-yard and the arrangement of the furniture in the house. They also described—speaking in unison—what the inmates of the house were doing. 'I can see your father and younger brother,' they said. 'They are carrying sacks of grain and loading them on a cart.'

"I made a careful note of the date and the hour," continued the Mongolian scientist, "and six months later, when I returned home, I asked my father whether he remembered what he was doing on that day. To my amazement he said that that was the day when he sold his surplus grain to a Russian trader, loading the sacks, with the aid of my brother, on the trader's cart."

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But even had I been inclined to disbelieve or doubt Badma Zhap's stories, my own experience would compel me to grant that the so-called prophetic lamas are really prophetic.

After my wife and her parents had transferred to Urga, we woke up one morning to find three of our horses gone. We looked for them in vain in all directions and finally my father-in-law advised me to consult a prophetic lama at the monastery as to the whereabouts of the lost animals.

I found the lama without much difficulty, and he

readily agreed to help me, though ordinarily, as he said, he only undertook to exercise his prophetic powers in matters of a more spiritual character. He called into his tent two young boys—his disciples—lighted two small oil lamps and commanded them to gaze into the flames. After a few minutes the lama abruptly asked them:

“Can you see the three horses?”

The two Mongolian children in a faltering voice said something unintelligible, then continued to gaze. The lama waited. After a short while he repeated the question:

“Can you see the three horses?”

“Yes,” came the reply.

“Where are they?”

“East of here, near some water.”

“Have they been stolen?” pursued the lama.

“No,” moaned the children, “one of the horses can’t move, the other two are grazing near it.”

The lama put a few further questions to the boys, then he said, sharply:

“That’ll do.”

The boys shook themselves, then laughing gaily, as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, they ran out of the tent. The lama explained where, according to the children’s statement, the three horses would be found.

I thanked him, gave him a few cents for his services and set off, in accordance with his directions, to look for the horses. After a walk of more than two hours I found two of the animals on the shore of a lake,

grazing peacefully. Looking round for the third one, I eventually discovered it sunk to its neck in a bog, from which, with its shackled legs, it had been unable to save itself. The other two horses apparently would not desert their brother: that was why they stayed in the vicinity.

In another case I consulted a lama in connection with the reconstruction of the power works. The Mongolian Government had already sanctioned the work, but they were undecided as to when it should be started, owing to certain difficulties, including the unfavourable condition of the ground. The Asiatic—even if he is otherwise “enlightened”—does not like to embark on any decisive undertaking without a reassuring prophecy as to its success, and so it happened that Purbah, a director of the power works, proposed to me that we should both visit a certain lama and ask him whether we should reconstruct the power works and, if so, when we should begin.

We hopped on our motor-cycles and raced down to the temple. I do not know whether it is quite tactful to travel to a prophet by such a modern mechanism, but our friend the lama did not appear to mind. He was a friendly old fellow and he welcomed us to his tent with real Mongolian hospitality, offering us tea and cigarettes and, of course, the most comfortable of his cushions. In the course of conversation Purbah timidly broached the object of our coming.

“With pleasure,” said the old man, rising. “Come along to the temple.”

We followed him into the temple, which looked

like a fairy castle, with a tall, Chinese roof composed of multi-coloured enamelled tiles and an entrance hung with bunting and precious brocades. The interior was crammed with gilt statues, silk carpets, Tibetan chalices, porcelain censers. In the background there were a number of small tablets inscribed with the names of the saints, while to the right and left the smoke of fragrant herbs rose from tall, thin vases and butter lamps flickered in the dusk of the temple.

On a table to the right of the entrance there was a large vase filled with numbered bamboo sticks. The lama picked it up and after shaking it asked us, in turn, to pull out a stick. This done, the lama took the sticks from us and walking to another table opened a large volume and for a while stood bending over the Chinese characters. Then he turned to Purbah, with an ecstatic expression on his face.

"If you start the work before new moon," he said, "you will soon be satisfied."

Then turning to me, he said:

"To you I say: It's a long way off and it'll take a long time to arrive."

I paid the old gentleman a fee of two dollars, though he refused to accept the money as such and was only persuaded to take it when I suggested that he should spend it on sweet herbs for the temple.

In accordance with the prophecy made to Purbah, work on the power works was started immediately. It proceeded at a satisfactory rate and all the anticipated difficulties disappeared. The building itself was completed in good time, but the power works

could not function to capacity until long after my departure from Mongolia—part of the machinery which we had ordered from Germany failed to arrive by the scheduled date, and it was only after my arrival in Hungary that I received a letter of apology from the German manufacturers for the delay, together with a notification that the last piece of machinery had arrived in Urga.

XXXIV

“BEWARE OF EUROPEANS!”

ANOTHER prophecy of which Cokto Badma Zhap told me concerned the fate of Mongolia and was made by no less a man than the *Bogdo Gegen*. I made notes of my conversations with Badma Zhap, then Minister of Justice, and here is the story, as nearly as possible in his own words.

“It happened in 1914. The *Bogdo Gegen* fell sick, and in spite of the lamas’ herbs and prayers and the efforts of a Russian doctor specially brought from over the border, his condition became so grave that he was expected to die at any moment. When the *Bogdo* lapsed into a coma the chief lamas were already making arrangements for the usual search for a successor. It was then that the sick man regained consciousness and, summoning to his bedside his ministers and chief priests, warned them in a weak, faltering voice to ‘beware of Europeans.’

“‘Perhaps my time has come,’ he said, ‘and the task of taking care of the country and protecting the interests of the people will fall to you. Spare no effort, no sacrifice. And if the enemy should prove too strong for you, pray for the aid of our eternal protectors. But beware of Europeans, and particularly Russians. If at any time you appeal to Russians for aid, our

country will be plunged into misery and bloodshed.’

“The *Bogdo*’s voice was barely audible and as he concluded he heaved a deep sigh and lay still, and everybody present thought that the end had come.

“But the *Bogdo* miraculously recovered and in accordance with his own prophecy he approached the Chinese Government with a view to concluding an agreement which would protect Mongolia against Russian penetration. There were at the time long articles in the Chinese newspaper *Bei-Tsin-Zhi-Bao* about the *Bogdo Gegen*’s offer. However, the Chinese Government, for some reason, probably for fear of Russia, rejected the Grand Lama’s suggestion, whereupon he communicated with the diplomatic representatives of France, Great Britain and the United States, offering their governments favourable trade agreements, mainly in order to weaken Russia, who held a dominant position in the Mongolian market.

“But he failed again, and a few years later the *Bogdo Gegen*, forgetting his death-bed prophecy, proved its truth by relying on the Russian White Army for the liberation of Mongolia from Chinese rule. Ungern’s robber hordes brought bloodshed and misery on the country, and in the end Mongolia was obliged to invite the aid of the Reds against the Whites.”

* * * *

The last *Bogdo Gegen* was no statesman. Like many of his predecessors, he was merely a weak tool in the hands of the foreign Powers who were playing a game of chess for the domination of Mongolia.

At the time of his prophecy in 1914, he had himself succumbed to the wiles of Tsarist diplomacy by marrying, contrary to the age-old traditions of his office. The Tsarist government had done everything in their power, by promises and flattery, to gain the *Bogdo's* favour, and made considerable progress. But there was one obvious snag—when the *Bogdo* died, the Regency responsible for the bringing up of the baby who would be the next reincarnation might withdraw all the favours granted by the *Bogdo*. The only way to prevent this—so the Tsarist diplomats thought—was to make the *Bogdo's* office hereditary and as the *Bogdo* was by tradition not allowed to marry, the Russians made it their business to discover an ancient Buddhist sacred book, which contained a convenient legend about a *Bogdo Gegen* of the past who married and thereby brought great good fortune upon his people. The holy man was probably tired of celibacy and he therefore did not look too deeply into the authenticity of the ancient book. After his marriage the Russians launched a fresh propaganda campaign to convince the *Bogdo* and everyone else that if the *Bogdo* had a son, that son would surely be the reincarnation of his father, so that it would not be necessary to look elsewhere for the next Grand Lama. Again the *Bogdo Gegen* was inclined to hold himself open to conviction. As it happened, however, there was no issue from his marriage and the Russian move would have failed even if the war and the revolution had not intervened.

The Chinese were even more subtle than the

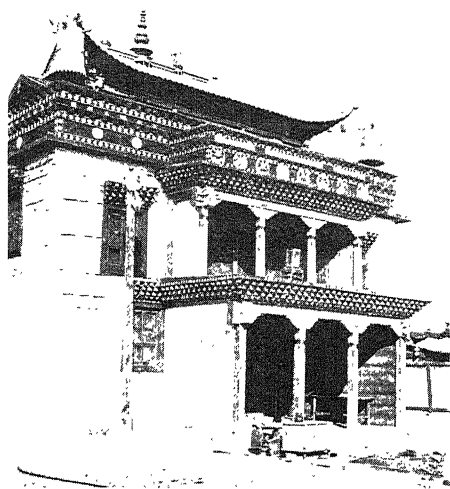
Russians in the struggle for mastery over Mongolia. Only rarely, in the course of the centuries, did they resort to violence. Their method was that of “peaceful penetration.” On the one hand, they made large donations to the various monasteries, thereby ensuring the lamas’ support of Chinese demands; and on the other, they exploited the Mongolian’s mania for titles in order to win over the influential Mongolian families to their side. Rich Mongolians were elevated to the rank of “Count” or “Duke,” and this ensured their complete dependence on Peking, for these titles could be withdrawn at any time if the “nobles” did not behave as the Chinese wanted them to behave. In addition, the “nobles” at a certain season of the year had to visit the Imperial Court in Peking, so that the Emperor’s personal influence was also brought to bear on them.

In this way the Chinese succeeded in seizing virtual power in Mongolia, which was followed by the merciless economic exploitation of the country. They offered loans even to the poorer classes of the population and by the method already described in an earlier chapter, they frequently fleeced the debtor of all he possessed.

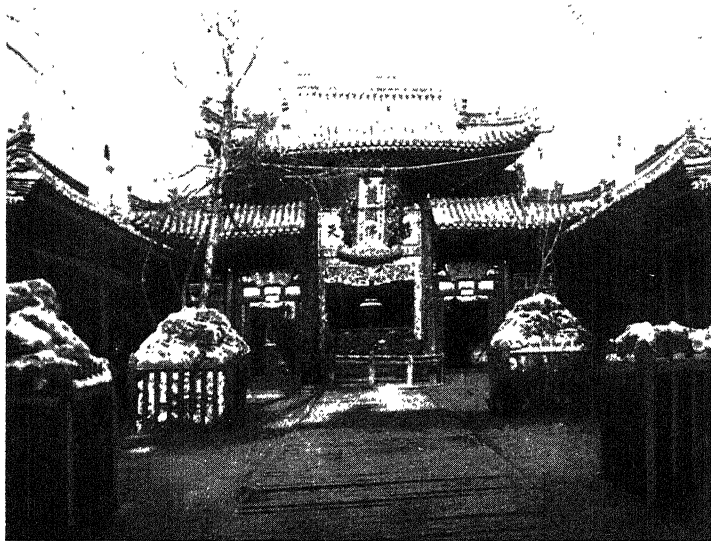
Meanwhile, the Russians were inciting the Mongolians against China and supplying them with arms and ammunition. When Mongolia finally succeeded in throwing off the Chinese yoke and proclaiming its independence, the country fell under the iron heel of Tsarist Russia which, through its consul at Urga, virtually ruled Mongolia.

But in addition to Russia and China, there was a third aspirant—Tibet—to exert influence in Mongolia. In the last resort the selection of Mongolia's *Bogdo Gegen* depended exclusively on the lamas of Tibet, the seat of Dalai Lama, the supreme religious head of the Buddhist religious world. But Tibet's religious influence in Mongolia was linked with important economic interests, as practically all the statuettes, pictures, censers and other objects used in Mongolia in the exercise of religious ritual were manufactured in Tibet. Every such object imported from China meant a loss to Tibet, and that was why the Dalai Lama, even in recent years, kept a special diplomatic representative in Urga. Choini-Lu-San-Chin-De, the Dalai Lama's ambassador, exerted considerable diplomatic skill in the interests of Tibetan trade and saw to it that every *mungo* (smallest Mongolian coin) spent on religious objects should go to Tibet. In the interests of Tibetan trade the Tibetan lamas frequently interfered—either openly or by underground methods—in Mongolia's internal political life.

And on top of all this there was Japan. During the World War Japan began to take an interest in Mongolian affairs. The Japanese launched the Pan-Mongolian movement by promising the Mongolians to help them to establish a great Mongolian Empire, comprising Inner and Outer Mongolia, Turkestan, Kobdo, Urunchai and the land of the Buriats. In great secrecy the Japanese suggested and assisted in the formation of a government for this great Mongolian Empire. Some members of this government, including



TEMPLE OF CHOIZI LAMA CHURE
(Mixed Chinese-Tibetan Style)



CHINESE TEMPLE AT URGA



BEFORE THE ENTRANCE TO THE TEMPLE OF URGA

Djamsarano, Cokto Badma Zhap and Sampilum, played an important part in Mongolian affairs after the success of the national revolution.

The “shadow government” of the Pan-Mongolian movement even appointed a delegation to attend the Versailles Peace Conference. It was the Japanese who were responsible for the formation of this delegation, yet it was they who prevented it from going to Versailles—the delegates, owing to a “series of accidents,” were unable to get further than Japan.

Later, when Baron Ungern came into Mongolia, the Japanese supported his campaign against the Chinese, and later still, in the spring of 1929, the Tokyo Government sent a mission to Mongolia to “study the possibilities of the country,” with a view to granting Mongolia a “large measure of support.” The Russians naturally heard about the peculiar mission and not wishing openly to oppose themselves to the Japanese plans, courteously granted the members of the mission transit visas through their territory. But when the delegation reached the Mongolian frontier the barriers were down against them—the frontier guards had secret instructions to turn them back.

The Soviet Government has now gained a firm foothold in Mongolia. Their first move was to invite impecunious young Mongolians to Moscow and give them a free education. This went on for some years, and when these highly educated youths returned to their native country they were naturally given high

positions in the government service. Through them, imbued as they were with the Communist ideology, the Soviet Government almost imperceptibly became master of Mongolia. In the parliamentary elections of 1929 the Moscow-trained young men, who were up till then in opposition to the Government, were returned with an overwhelming majority.

By that time education, up till then practically non-existent in Mongolia, had become an important factor. The National Government, immediately upon coming into power, established a number of State schools, and public education gradually passed from the hands of the lamas into those of the State. Attempts to establish schools in the European sense had been made before, but never with any degree of success, because the people persisted in sending their children to the lamas. But the National Government's Minister of Education, Batu Khan, was a shrewd man. He built a number of boarding schools where the scholars received not only a free education but also free maintenance, and even pocket money. During the first year the scholars at the so-called "civil" schools were all children of poor parents, but by the following year there were so many applications that the number of schools had to be considerably increased. This was due to the fact that the "better class" parents realised—as Batu Khan had intended—that the higher posts in the Civil Service would be given to those members of the younger generation who have enjoyed a secular education, and with that realisation came the sudden abandonment of the lama

schools and a concentrated rush to the Government schools.

Mongolia's school system is based on the European model, with elementary, secondary and high schools or universities. Part of the University of Urga is housed in the late *Bogdo Gegen's* summer palace, while the high schools occupy various other old buildings. The teachers are professionals trained for the purpose and also lamas, and the method of tuition is precisely the same as in Europe.

Thus Mongolia is doing its best to prevent foreign influences permeating the country through the schools; but in the economic field the position is far worse and the Government has been unable so far to obviate the danger of foreign economic dominance.

There was no Mongolian currency until the year 1925. While the country formed part of China the Chinese standard was employed, silver, by weight, being used as currency with the *lan*—between 30 and 40 grammes—as the unit. After 1912 began the invasion of Russian currency and banknotes to the value of from two to four million roubles were annually imported into the country. In addition, the Russian traders brought in a large quantity of forged banknotes, with which they heartlessly defrauded the Mongolians. One Russian trader imported a score of cases of pencils wrapped in forged banknotes and bought up, with worthless paper, grain, skins and other products.

The Russian inflation naturally also threw Mongolia's finances into hopeless chaos; paper roubles

were handled by the sackful as so much rubbish. Baron Ungern was the first to issue Mongolian "national" banknotes, and he did so solely in order to secure some means of payment which he could force upon the population by sheer terror. Needless to say, Ungern's banknotes had no value whatever.

Next came as Mongolian currency the Chinese or—as it is called in China itself—Mexican dollar, which is equivalent to about 0.7 *lan*.

The Chinese dollar went out in 1925, when Parliament sanctioned the establishment of the Mongolian Bank of Trade and Industry, the capital of which was provided in equal proportions by the Government and the Far Eastern Bank. That brought into being the Mongolian national currency, the *tugrik* (about 2s. 6d.), which is based on the gold standard. The *mungo* is one hundredth part of the *tugrik* and is made of copper. The Government at first found it extremely difficult to persuade the population to accept the gold standard, as the Mongolians were used to silver as currency and knew gold purely as merchandise. But the heavy fall of the value of silver in the East—in India and China—finally brought the benefits of the change home to the inhabitants of Mongolia.

The introduction of the gold standard—and banknotes—contributed to the revival of trade, as up till then the weight of the means of payment made the transaction of business very difficult. Loads of silver had to be carried for thousands of miles by camel or bullock caravan, so that bargains of any importance took many weeks to complete. The national revenue

was collected in the same way, even from the farthest corners of the country, and tax-collectors spent the greater part of their time on the road. The issue of banknotes at one stroke swept away all these difficulties, with great advantage to the country's economic life.

After the regulation of the currency question the Mongolians wanted to establish their own national bank, and an Act to that effect was passed by Parliament in 1928. The Russians, however, have so far managed to prevent the consummation of the Act, because they are afraid that the establishment of an entirely independent National Bank would sound the death-knell of their economic influence in Mongolia.

Since the introduction of the national currency Mongolia has become a factor in the world markets. The country has vast surpluses of beef, cattle, hides, furs, animal hair and wool, and before the depression Mongolia exported millions of pounds' worth of goods to China, Russia, Germany, England and America. The exports were, and are, directed by the joint Russo-Mongolian Bank, which now has numerous branches in all parts of the country. In order to give an idea of the dimensions of Mongolia's international trade, it will be sufficient to mention that in the year 1927 the value of exported marmot skins alone amounted to £1,000,000 (at par). Naturally, powerful foreign concerns have attempted to monopolise this vast trade, but the Mongolian Government has so far succeeded in frustrating these attempts, mainly with the aid of its adequately capitalised co-operative. In addition, customs duties and the income-tax of

THE NEW MONGOLIA

foreigners have been increased and the financial position of foreign firms has also been rendered difficult by other measures.

Goods for export almost exclusively leave the country by camel or bullock caravan over ancient caravan routes. The distances these caravans cover can only be expressed in thousands of miles. In recent years the motor-car has to some extent replaced the older and slower means of transport. As the latter are all home-produced, while motor vehicles have to be imported from abroad, the Mongolian Government, before I left the country, was already considering the idea of establishing a motor-car factory.

Mongolian imports are almost entirely in the hands of Soviet Russia. The joint bank gave them a decisive influence on Mongolia's economy, not entirely to the country's detriment, as the Russians reduced the rate of interest on loans to a reasonable level from the usurious rates charged by the Chinese. However, the Russians used the resources of the Bank to support or finance the various Russian co-operatives, who were granted unlimited credit. Otherwise bank loans were freely granted to all reliable Mongolians and only against goods at warehouse to individual Russian traders. At the same time, as the only organ authorised to effect transfers of foreign exchange, the Bank was able gradually to undermine private enterprise, establishing for the Russian co-operatives a virtual monopoly of Russo-Mongolian trade and almost completely forcing foreign traders out of the country.

Owing to the fact that Mongolia had a stabilised currency, goods imported from Russia were in many cases cheaper in Mongolia than in the country of origin, and owing to Russia's careful nursing of the Mongolian market many articles that were entirely unobtainable in Russia were freely sold in Mongolia. At all events, the foreign firms were unable to compete with the Russian co-operatives, as the latter were frequently enabled to sell their goods in the Mongolian market at or under cost, and at the time of my visit there were no foreign firms of any size in Mongolia.

All these battles took place behind the scenes of the country's economic life, and the Mongolian "man in the street" only realised what was happening when one or other of the unsuccessful combatants was forced to come on the stage for the final scene of surrender.

BIRTH OF THE MONGOLIAN DRAMA

THE political movements, administrative changes and exciting criminal trials failed to affect the external aspect of the Mongolian capital. The struggle for independence had been proceeding for decades, so that a little bloodshed or a few executions were not sufficient to move the inhabitants of Urga unduly. The coming into power of the National Government and the fact that this meant, at one stroke, more rights and greater protection for the people and perhaps also a better standard of existence for the poverty-stricken nomad and hunter or for the ragged horse-dealers of Urga—all this was accepted with stolid acquiescence, in the same way as many other changes and innovations.

Perhaps the greatest sensation at that time was caused by the erection of fourteen public conveniences in the streets of Urga. The idea came from a Hungarian prisoner of war, who considered that the interests of sanitation were not adequately served by the canine scavengers which up till then carried all street refuse out of the city inside their bellies. Accordingly, he proposed to the Government to have public conveniences erected, advancing well-reasoned arguments in favour of the scheme, and offering to undertake the

necessary work himself. He was commissioned to build the conveniences and was given the required finance, and shortly afterwards fourteen conveniences stood ready in various parts of the city. The inhabitants of Urga at first stood round these new sights and gazed at them with admiration, but after a few days they made a point of giving them a wide berth. Finally a deputation was sent to the Government to ask for the removal of the new "public buildings," as the people of Urga considered it "far better to have human excreta consumed by dogs than to have it stored in the middle of the town." The Government lost no time in complying with the citizens' request, and soon the public conveniences disappeared from the streets of Urga.

So that, too, went on as before. Men and women continued to crouch down on the edge of the pavement, in main roads as well as in side streets, and calmly proceeded to satisfy the claims of nature. What made this custom still more remarkable was the fact that solo performances were rare; groups of five or six people used to forgather on the pavement and carry on a conversation lasting for many minutes. Then came the dogs and cleared away all traces of the social gathering.

After the advent of the National Government a few public buildings after the European style were erected in Urga, and the old Chinese and Tibetan styles of architecture were also almost completely abandoned in private buildings. The new buildings, which rose by the score, looked clumsy and ugly

beside the older structures. The Chinese architects and builders, though they use the cheap building material obtainable in the district, construct peculiarly shaped houses that are a symphony of grace and colour. The Tibetan buildings impress by their dignified dimensions and the wonderful harmony of line and colour which is characteristic of all their architecture. The new European buildings bring a rude note into the refined, inspiring picture represented by the older architecture; the Russo-Mongolian Bank, the Prime Minister's Palace, the Ministry of Finance and the Town Hall, are piles of wood and stone, with no more grace in their aspect than a factory or a barracks.

The internal equipment of these public buildings, on the other hand, is all that could be desired from the viewpoint of practical utility and up-to-dateness. For instance, the State printing works are equipped with the most modern machinery.

An interesting experiment is represented by the many State-owned industrial establishments. They include a brickworks, a textile mill, a carpet factory, a tannery, and a flour mill. The publicly owned establishments were started on a small scale, because, on the one hand, the Government wished to test their suitability and, on the other, it was considered that small workshops provided better industrial training than a large, departmentalised manufactory. Then, if a small establishment functioned without loss the Government extended it; if not, it was simply closed down. It was in this way that

the Urga power works, the State-owned coal and gold mines, the alcohol distillery, tannery and flour mill developed to their present large dimensions. The domestic industries—such as boot-making, etc.—are entirely free from State interference.

The Mongolians at first did not take kindly to industrial work. Though prepared to risk their lives grazing their cattle over the most difficult country or hunting in the mountains, they considered that industrial work, and particularly building, which involved the carrying of loads, as below the dignity of a self-respecting Mongolian and only fit for Chinamen and coolies. Gradually, however, the Government has taught them that any work was—just work.

The most popular public institution is the National Theatre—designed by me—which also serves as their Parliament. Formerly the theatre to the Mongolian people was represented by the mystery plays performed by lamas in the temple courts. At the conclusion of a religious festival the crowds used to pour into the temple court and eagerly watch the dialogue scenes from the lives of Buddha and his saints, performed by lama-actors wearing huge masks, on the stage-like balcony of the temple gate. The new Mongolian Government, however, did everything in its power to create a Mongolian dramatic literature free from Chinese and other influences, offering valuable prizes for Mongolian plays. That was how *Djenghis Khan*, a mighty historical drama, came into being. The play, which consists of scenes from

the life of the greatest figure in Mongolian history, was first performed in the National Theatre in 1926. The performance lasted four hours and was such a success that it had to be repeated a number of times.

The actors were all amateurs, and so was the producer—a group of young people who were entire novices in the field of the theatre and the drama, yet their production was sufficiently good to create an intense interest in the drama. The performances of *Djenghis Khan* were naturally also attended by foreigners, principally Russians, and later the Russians made a film on the subject, in which the majority of the Urga actors co-operated.

The new theatre is 100 feet long and 50 feet high, and is an up-to-date building in every sense. There is an imposing vestibule, a library and a restaurant. The auditorium is of the usual horse-shoe shape, with boxes and stalls, and a total seating capacity of 1,200. The whole theatre is electrically ventilated, and the stage has the most modern lighting equipment.

The theatre occasionally also serves as a cinema. At first only Russian silent films were shown, with Russian sub-titles, which were translated to the audience by an interpreter standing by the side of the screen. Later came the American films, but these appealed far less to the Mongolians, who failed to grasp the greater part of the plot. The only American films that went off “with a bang” in Urga were the Wild West pictures, which were more in keeping with the Mongolian mentality.

XXXVI

THE CHINESE THEATRE

IN contrast with the Mongolian theatre, the Chinese theatre is an old-established institution. The typical Chinese drama is a religious ceremony, a moral lesson and a circus and cabaret performance all rolled into one. Some performances take a whole day, while others proceed for several days.

One day, accompanied by a friend, I attended a Chinese theatrical performance in Urga. It was an interesting experience. The auditorium was packed with small tables, in front of which sat the audience on short benches. Attendants were walking to and fro among the tables, carrying enormous tea cans from which they served the audience free of charge. They also supplied sunflower or pumpkin seed, and even "monkey nuts," on request. All this was included in the price of the seat, which ranged from twopence to five shillings (at par). The high-priced seats were in raised boxes, but though their occupants belonged to a more well-to-do class than the "stallites," they too munched the free food and sipped the free tea with great gusto. Meanwhile, everybody was smoking from long-stemmed, tiny-bowled Chinese pipes and the whole auditorium was enveloped in a cloud of tobacco smoke, so that the bunting and coloured

lanterns that hung from the roof and the balcony were hardly discernible.

Needless to say, the theatre was as hot as an oven and the smoke-laden air all but unbreatheable. But the management apparently did not lack foresight. There was, in a corner of the auditorium, a fireplace with a large copper of boiling water over it. Attendants stood round the copper, busily dipping towels into the water, wringing them out, and throwing them to patrons at a shouted request. The patron would wipe his face over with the hot towel, twist it into a ball and throw it back at the attendant. Sometimes there were thirty or forty towels flying about over the heads of the audience, not only before the performance and during intervals but also during the performance. The auditorium recalled a tennis court, with a non-stop tournament in progress. Both patrons and attendants threw and caught the rag balls with miraculous skill.

The stage was wedge-shaped and reached right into the auditorium, so that patrons saw the play from different angles. The stage equipment was of the simplest, consisting almost entirely of a gorgeously embroidered back cloth with a curtained aperture cut out in it on the right and left. The actors always entered on the left and made their exit on the right. There was practically no scenery. For instance, the walls of a fortress were represented by a number of tables and chairs arranged in a pyramid. These tables and chairs were also used by the actors in the performance of some staggeringly clever acrobatic acts.

Properties were also of the simplest, so that the scene of the action and many of the objective circumstances were left entirely to the audience's imagination. For instance, when one of the actors took a long whip between his legs and ran about the stage, we were supposed to imagine him galloping on a horse.

The company consisted entirely of men, and female parts were performed by men dressed as women. The actors' pay, as my friend explained, varies a great deal, just as in Europe, but as a general rule the actors receive 80 per cent of the gross takings, while the management has to be content with the balance of 20 per cent. The "stars," of whom the Chinese theatre also has a few, take—according to their importance—a larger share of the amount allotted for actors' salaries.

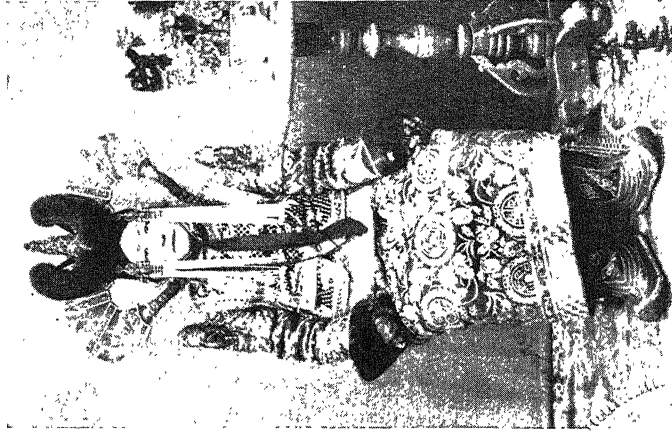
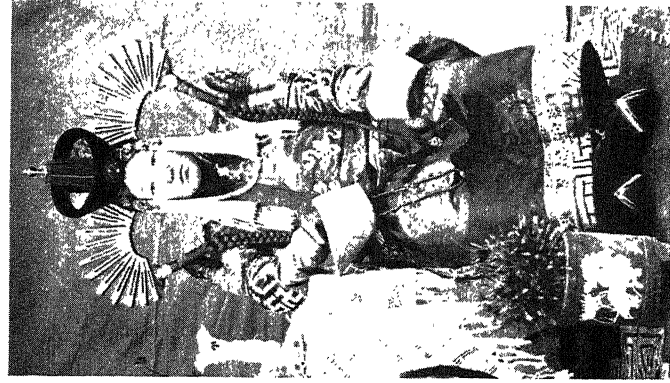
Suddenly the orchestra struck up and the din of conversation in the theatre subsided. Prominent among the sounds that constitute Chinese music was the twang of the Chinese guitar and the plaintive screech of the *tsum*, which is akin to the saxophone.

After the musical prelude the performance began. The title of the play was *San-Nian-Tsiao-Tsi*, or *The Third Wife Raises the Boy*. The story relates to one Su-Ye-Guan, who goes on a long journey on official business, leaving his three wives behind. He stays away so long that his family presume him dead, and as an aged servant named Bao who is sent to find and bring home his master's body returns bearing a skeleton, this presumption is confirmed. The old man has made a mistake, but his burden is regarded

by two of Su-Ye-Guan's wives as sufficient proof for them to remarry. Only the third wife, Tsun-Ye, remains faithful to her husband's memory and devotes herself to the rearing and education of Su-Ye-Tsi, her husband's son by his second wife. The boy completes his schooling with honours and becomes a government official, that being the highest social degree in China. The years pass, then, suddenly, the supposedly dead Su-Ye-Guan returns home as a government official of the highest rank. It is revealed that his long absence was due to the nature of his official duties, which forbade him to communicate with his family and indicate his whereabouts. The first two wives, now remarried, hear about the return of their first husband laden with riches and honours, and would like to regain his favour, but Su-Ye-Guan refuses to forgive their treachery. The story reaches the Emperor's ears, who is very pleased with the loyalty of his servant and the virtue of his wife, and presents a tablet to the family as a sign of his favour.

The tablet bears four signs: "*Tsun*," "*Siao*," "*Tsyé*" and "*I*." "*Tsun*" means loyal subject, and applies to the self-sacrificing husband; "*Siao*" signifies "respector of parents," which is a tribute to the boy Su-Ye-Tsi; "*Tsyé*," or "wise," stands in praise of the third wife; and finally "*I*," or "loyal," acknowledges the merits of the servant Bao.

If the reader should think that this is only the basis of a complicated plot to follow, he would be mistaken, for this is the whole story. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that its presentation took as long as



MONGOLIAN WOMEN IN GALA COSTUME
Tassels of real pearls hang from their headgear



JOSEPH GELETA WITH THREE MONGOLIAN FRIENDS

eight hours. In between the presentation of the "drama" proper there were many comings and goings on the stage, sermons on moral attributes were "sung," in a long drawn, plaintive voice, to the accompaniment of soft music, or an actor would suddenly climb on top of the furniture-pyramid and perform hair-raising acrobatic tricks, or perhaps only make cart-wheels on the floor.

Chinese plays, as I later discovered, never have any plot to speak of. The simple story is only a framework for songs extolling the moral virtues.

XXXVII

PLAYED ALIVE—FOR PLEASURE

AMONG the various amenities offered by the Mongolian capital, the baths are not the least interesting. The Chinese baths are the most popular, not only because they employ the most ingenious methods to please their patrons but also, indirectly, because the perfection of the service has turned these establishments into veritable clubs. Some patrons even spend the night at the bath, between walls that are inlaid with vari-coloured, precious porcelain tiles.

Externally the baths with their gilt pagoda roofs, vari-coloured pillars, decorative turrets and silk flags, look like the rich residence of a distinguished mandarin. Inside, each bath has a large hall with clean beds ranged along the walls and beautiful little tables in front of them. As soon as the patron arrives he is ushered by an attendant to one of the beds, where his clothes are peeled off within a few seconds. Then he is given a bag of soda crystals and a towel, with which he immediately proceeds to the next room, where there are two large pools of water. One of these is boiling hot, the other somewhat cooler, and the visitor must first take a dip in the latter if he is to bear the scalding heat of the hot pool. The use of soap is forbidden, as this would dirty the water, but

the bag of soda may be employed instead. Those who object to the common pool have the choice of separate, smaller pools.

But the dip is only the beginning of the pleasures awaiting the visitor at a Chinese bath. It is followed by a fierce onslaught from the hefty masseurs who lie in wait for him upon his return to the main hall. After the massage the patron is virtually flayed alive, the superficial dead skin being mercilessly rubbed off until the air is full of flying white pellets, not to speak of the moans of the willing victim.

The visitor's corns are next dealt with by a highly skilled pedicurist, who works so rapidly that after a few swift flashes of his knife not a trace of the offending callouses remains.

When all this is over the visitor returns to his clean, perfumed bed, to recline in divine contentment and be wooed by sweet, restful sleep. But before he falls asleep he partakes of the freshly made tea provided free by the establishment, or smokes a pipe, or takes a pinch of snuff from the snuff bowl that stands on his table. Or he may not go to sleep at all, for in the body of the hall the other patrons have gathered in groups, talking and laughing, sometimes romping about like care-free children and indulging in a mild form of horse-play, so that the individual patron may prefer to join them.

After a pleasant chat the visitor may stroll into the barber's cabin, where without a word he is pushed into a chair. The barber—for some reason which I have been unable to discover—vigorously slaps his

naked shoulders, then hangs a white cloth round his neck and swiftly lathers his head. A few strokes with the short, wide blade of the Chinese razor and the visitor's head is as bald as a billiard ball. Next come the eyebrows, which are shaved off completely. The face is not shaved, because, as I have already mentioned, the Mongolian removes all hirsute growth from his face with the aid of a pair of tweezers, so that his whiskers never have a chance to grow. On the other hand, the razor is also used in removing the hair from the nostrils and the ears. The operation is completed by scrubbing out the nose and ears with tiny brushes.

In view of all this it is not surprising that the gentlemen of Urga like to spend their time at the Chinese baths. There is no extra charge if a patron chooses to spend the night there, and tea, tobacco and snuff are there for the taking. And the price? No, there is no snag—the price of this princely service is the equivalent of eightpence.

* * * *

One of the most interesting sights of Ulan Bator Choto—as Urga is now officially called—are its markets. The principal market occupies a square in the centre of the city, with rows upon rows of huts and open stalls, among which crowds of Mongolians, Chinese and Tibetans, dressed in silk of all colours, move hither and thither in calm, rhythmic waves. The stalls are surrounded not only by intending buyers but also by thousands of sightseers, and the air is filled with the noise of loud disputes, argu-

ments and haggling, while some of the dealers extol their wares in a clamorous sing-song or demonstrate the quality of an article by rattling, banging or—if it is a musical instrument—playing it.

The special markets include the cattle market, which commands the Mongolian's interest more than any other. The Mongolian's standard of value is still, in spite of the introduction of a stabilised national currency, the sheep, bullock or horse, and when he makes a profit on a transaction his concern is not with the number of *tugriks* he has made but with the number of animals he can buy with the proceeds of the deal. Hence the cattle market is the best frequented and also the noisiest in all Urga. The special timber, fur and other markets necessarily have a more restricted attendance.

But to return to the principal market—the *zachadir*—there is hardly a trade or profession that is not represented at these gatherings. The traders, who generally move from market to market and have no fixed business address, can supply anything from precious stones to door locks, while the artisans, who are mainly Chinese, tempt passers-by with offers to mend their shoes or sandals, polish their jewellery, shoe their horses, and so on. Naturally, the public story-tellers, the *buruchun*, who entertain their audiences with historical and other tales, narrated in song, are also present, while odd corners are occupied by mendicant lamas who do not belong to a monastery and whose vows oblige them to live by charity. Crouching on the ground, with a piece of leather

spread out before them, they spend their time turning their prayer-wheel and gazing mutely into nothingness, except when, in a hollow, ghostly voice, they thank a passer-by for a coin thrown on the strip of leather.

One part of the market is reserved for the physician lamas, at whose stalls herbs or powdered animal flesh are offered as a cure for all the ills that man is heir to. And next door to the "doctors," you may have your hair shaved off by an open-air barber.

XXXVIII

THE BOX PRISON AND OTHER EXAMPLES OF MONGOLIAN JUSTICE

ONE day I handed a valuable parcel of crude topaz stones to a motor-driver who was going to Kalgan. The parcel was addressed to a firm of diamond polishers in Antwerp, and the reason I gave it to this man was that it was impossible to register and insure a consignment of this kind in Urga, but quite a simple matter in Kalgan. Naturally, I paid him for his services and, just as naturally, impressed upon him the necessity of obtaining a receipt at the post office and bringing it back to me. A few weeks later the motor-driver returned to Urga, but did not call on me. When I sought him out and demanded the postal receipt he said that he had forgotten it in Kalgan. I was quite certain, in my own mind, that the man was lying, so I consulted Purbah, my colleague at the electric power works.

"Denounce him to the *tusumin*" (magistrate), advised Purbah.

Deciding to act on this advice I went to the magistrate's tent. The tent was empty, save for the magistrate's servant, who ran out to fetch his master. After a few minutes the representative of Mongolian justice arrived, an ordinary Mongolian in somewhat greasy clothes and of unimpressive presence. The

magistrate asked me into his tent, sat down on a cushion and after inviting me to follow his example he asked me what he could do for me.

I told him my story, producing a note, which I had been prudent enough to exact from the motor-driver, acknowledging receipt of the stones.

"Well," said the magistrate shaking his head, "we'll have to look into this."

Calling his servant, he ordered him to find the accused and bring him along at once. The magistrate and I were left alone in the tent. "His worship" sat with his head in his hands, without speaking until, about half an hour later, the servant returned with the motor-driver.

As they entered the tent the magistrate raised his head and fixing the man with a searching look said, stressing every syllable:

"This man accuses you of failing to deliver to him the postal receipt for a parcel posted by you on his behalf. Is that true? And if it is, why did you do it?"

The defendant repeated the excuse he had already made to me.

"You're lying," the magistrate turned on him; "you did not post the stones!"

The defendant dropped his arms despondently.

"I confess," he said, "I left the stones with a friend in Kalgan."

"Scoundrel!" bawled the magistrate. "I shall keep you in prison until the stones are returned to this man."

"Be merciful," whined the motor-driver. "I must

start for Kalgan again to-morrow. I've got many passengers with whom I have already agreed."

"All right," said the magistrate, "you may go—provided you can find a hostage." Then, turning to me: "Do you agree?"

"I bow to your orders," I replied.

"All right," said the magistrate, turning to the defendant. "But the hostage I want must be a well-to-do man and he must stand guarantee for your return with his entire fortune. I'll go so far as to refrain from keeping him locked up, but he must not leave the city until your return. And if you don't settle the matter before new moon, you'll suffer for it."

The magistrate's summary method proved successful. The motor-driver reported to the magistrate before the stipulated date, and I was sent for. The man counted out the stones before us and I agreed that the number was correct. Then:

"Do you want me to punish him?" asked the magistrate.

"No, sir," I replied.

"Well," said the magistrate to the motor-driver, "you're lucky. I shan't punish you this time, but mind you keep straight in future, otherwise it'll go ill with you."

That was the end of my *cause célèbre*. On my way home, with the recovered stones in my pocket, I wondered how long a European court would have taken over a small matter like this, and how much of the taxpayers' money would have been wasted on it.

* * * *

However, the administration of justice in Mongolia is far less primitive than might be concluded from this incident. After the revolution the law was modernised, mainly after the Russian and English patterns. Formerly, and particularly during Mongolia's subjection to China, the Chinese laws, which punish practically every minor crime with the bastinado, were in force. The culprit's feet were bared, and a number of strokes with a stout bamboo stick were inflicted on his soles. In other directions, however, the Chinese law was far from antiquated. I need only quote the law relating to unfair competition, which dates from the year 1725, during the reign of Emperor Yung-Ching.

"Merchants who," says this law, "spy out the methods of their neighbours, purchasing identical goods and selling them at a lower price than their competitor can afford, thereby ensuring a bigger turnover for themselves, shall be punished with forty strokes of the bastinado."

In addition, profits so obtained are to be regarded as stolen money, and must be confiscated.

The penalties imposed by Chinese law—which was practised for a long time in Mongolia—included three different methods of execution: beheading, strangling and shooting. The first was regarded as the most shameful, because the severed head was stuck on a pole and exhibited as a deterrent example, the family receiving only the headless body, and from a religious point of view this was the greatest calamity that could befall a person.

A fourth method of execution—the *ling-chi*, or death by torture—was reserved for the murder of a parent, a partner in marriage or the attempted murder of the Emperor and high treason. The procedure was to tie the condemned man to a cross, at the foot of which stood a basket containing a number of knives, each marked according to the part of the body for which it was intended. The executioner took out a knife at random, looked at the mark—and applied the knife. Then another knife came out of the basket, and so on, until the crucified man had been carved up. It required considerable influence to persuade the executioner to “happen” to pick out first the knife with which the victim’s heart was to be pierced. However, this horrible method of enforcing the death penalty was applied very rarely and during the last few decades—at least in Mongolia—not at all.

Next in importance to capital punishment came courses of torture with various instruments, the bastinado and the pillory, but the first- and last-named penalties were abolished long ago.

A rather interesting aspect of the Chinese legal system was the fact that anonymous denunciations had to be burned by the authorities and could not be proceeded upon. This law was in force in the “barbarous” East when “civilised” Venice kept men and women in the lead chambers or had them drowned under the Bridge of Sighs merely because someone had made an anonymous charge against them.

There is one kind of crime that is entirely unknown among Mongolians—killings or woundings from

sexual jealousy never occur, for the simple reason that the Mongolian's ideas of love and marriage preclude sexual jealousy. A Mongolian husband thinks nothing of it if his wife "betrays" him, particularly as he himself very often offers her—or his daughter—for a night's amusement to an honoured guest. In view of this it is hardly likely that he should thirst for the blood of a "seducer." It must be added, however, that adultery in such circumstances entirely depends on the wife's consent.

Theft under the old Chinese law was very severely punished in Mongolia, particularly the theft of cattle. In the majority of cases the culprit did not come to trial before a court of law, because the enraged cattlemen lynched him. If the thief managed to escape this and was later caught by the authorities, if he was the first offender he was condemned to lose his right arm. A second offence involved the loss of the other arm, while if the armless thief somehow managed to commit a third theft he was beheaded. But there was another, more terrible penalty that thieves were sometimes made to suffer.

The thief was secured with chains, then a large bag of wild onions was tied over his hand so firmly that blood circulation was almost completely stopped. The bag was not removed for many weeks, during which the wild onions fermented and the corrosive substance thus produced literally rotted the hand away. It is easy to imagine the horrible torture the convicted man must have suffered before the bag was finally removed, together with what remained of his hand,

leaving a festering stump. This punishment in most cases killed the victim.

With the advent of the National Government, the old, barbarous methods of punishment were abolished, together with the death penalty, and a modern criminal code on European lines was introduced. Capital punishment was, however, reintroduced later for high treason and murder.

With the abolition of the old forms of punishment, the Urga prison, up till then a place of unspeakable horror, was also reformed. The prison lies in the centre of the city, and consists of a number of floor-lever buildings surrounded by a tall timber fence. There are well-tended gardens close by, and not far away flows the Silba River on its way, past the gorgeous palaces of the *Bogdo Gegen*, to the Tola. But within the prison—during the Chinese regime—convicts were kept in wooden boxes only just sufficiently large to enable them to sit, with their chins resting on their knees. They were fed with thin, messy soup through a hole in the side of the box, while another hole at the bottom served for the convicts' only other need for which provision was made. The box was only unlocked when the convict was dead, and then his body was thrown to the dogs.

To-day the prison is run on more humane lines and the death-boxes are in the museum, among other relics of the horrible past.

FESTIVALS

THE New Year celebrations begin—since the recent adoption of the Gregorian Calendar—on the first of January, when the people of Urga, as well as thousands of pilgrims from distant parts of the country, visit the Breven Chit monastery to atone for their sins. The Breven Chit lies on the Holy Mountain and houses the greatest lamas, through whom the prayers of the pilgrims are believed to reach their destination in the shortest time. On New Year's Day an endless procession of men, women and children winds its way over the snow-covered mountain slope, mostly on foot, except for the very old, who ride on mountain ponies. The path is strewn with huge boulders, brought down by some prehistoric avalanche, and they stand like grim sentinels on the way to the monastery, which on other days must not be approached by ordinary mortals. The endless crowds climb the mountain in solemn silence, sunk in meditation, and only stop when they come to an *obo*—a heap of stones—which they decorate with coloured *chadaks*, designed to propitiate the spirits of the mountain, so that they should not send a storm or a pack of wolves to endanger the lives of the pilgrims. Some pilgrims leave on the *obo*

an article of clothing, or a lump of dough mixed with the blood of a sacrificed animal, or a small clay Buddha brought from a Tibetan pilgrimage.

Most of the pilgrims carry a talisman of some sort round their necks to protect them from evil spirits on the long journey, while the lamas, in addition to their rosaries, bear boxes filled with Tibetan prayers.

The Breven Chit monastery covers a large area and its fences are several miles long. When a pilgrim reaches the fence he falls on his face and covers a few yards crawling on his stomach, then he rises, recites an "*Om mani padme hum*," and falls on his face again, crawling another few yards over the frozen ground. The process is repeated until the pilgrim has crawled round the fence and back to his starting-point. Some pilgrims tie a kerchief round their heads, in order to prevent injury to their foreheads from repeated contact with the hard ground, while the hands are protected by pieces of wood tied on with leather thongs. The pilgrim must not interrupt his crawling until he has completed the course, or unless the sun sets before he has done so. In that case he may go away for the night, but must return on the morrow to resume the crawl. On New Year's Day, and for several days afterwards, thousands of men, women and children can be seen rising from the ground and falling on their faces again, hour after hour, to the accompaniment of moans and groans as they recite the set prayer.

But when the period of atonement is over and all

the pilgrims have completed their long crawl, the *Cagan Sara*, or "White Month" Festival, begins in real earnest. The pilgrims return to their homes, or in the case of strangers to their friends' homes, put on their best clothes, and celebrate their absolution from sin with true Mongolian abandon. The whole city is in a turmoil, with parties going on in many houses, merry crowds in the streets, fireworks, singing, and not a little drinking. Champagne with fermented mares' milk, vodka with Chinese *bandjina*, French brandy with Mongolian *archi*—these are the favourite drinks during the White Month Festival. The masks used at the Cam Festival are brought out again, and there are carnival processions in which the entire population participates. The White Month Festival is subsidised by the Government, and large amounts are also donated by private individuals, in order to ensure the success of the celebration.

The carnival processions are also joined by people who have performed their penance at a monastery other than Breven Chit, and for ten or twelve days the city of Urga is the scene of unrestrained merry-making.

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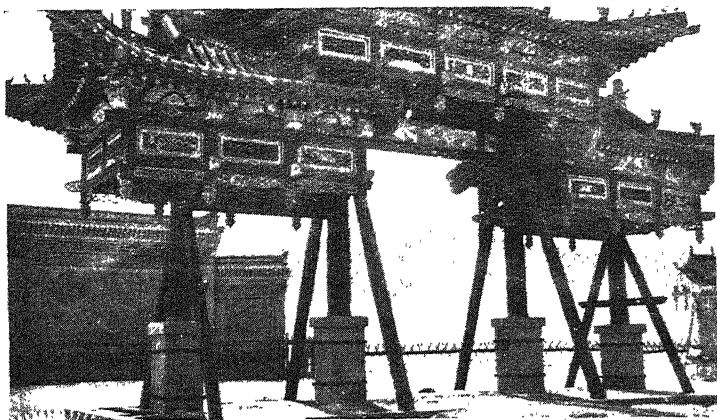
The next festival in the year is the Maideri Festival, which is held in the spring. Maideri is the Buddha Messiah, whose ninety-foot gilt statue is enthroned in the Ganden temple, and who is to come to earth thousands of years hence in order to redeem mankind and proclaim the new law. The Maideri Festival is



TRAVELLING "IN COMFORT" IN THE GOBI DESERT



"BUFFET" AND COOK AT THE FIRST SESSION OF THE MON-
GOLIAN PARLIAMENT, HELD IN THE OPEN AIR



SOUTH GATE OF BOGDO GEGEN'S WINTER PALACE



THE LAST OF BOGDO'S CONFIDENTIAL STAFF
The Giant was his Bodyguard

also celebrated with a big procession. The procession is headed by Maideri's coach, which is decorated with six enormous carved horses' heads, in addition to a number of "prayer flags." These flags are inscribed with the sacred formula "*Om mani padme hum,*" and are supposed, with every flutter, to offer up a prayer on behalf of the lamas and the people to the Avaloki Teshvari, or "the Lord who Looks Down."

The sacred coach is followed by an enormous drum fitted to a pair of wheels and drawn by lamas. The thunderous sound of this drum only ceases upon the conclusion of the procession, merging with the din of the "orchestra" that follows behind. There is a forest of small prayer flags carried by lamas, then a miles-long procession of the common people. The weather is invariably warm during the Maideri Festival, so the procession from time to time stops for a brief rest and a cup of steaming tea. Then the march is resumed until the procession reaches a monastery, where the lamas climb up to the roof terrace of the temple and divine service begins.

* * * *

The great National Festival takes place in the summer. It includes the *Nadan*—the Mongolian Olympiad—which dates back to the time of Djenghis Khan. The *Nadan* is held on a plateau on the northern slope of Bogdo-Ul. The plateau is about ten miles long and four miles wide, and it is here that Mongolia's best wrestlers, riders and shots compete for prizes offered by the Government.

During the *Nadan* the green pastures of the plateau are covered with the bright-coloured tents of Chinese and Mongolian restaurateurs, and tens of thousands of spectators who, between events, swarm round the enormous barrels of fermented mares' milk provided free by a benevolent government. The events themselves go on from dawn till dusk. There are no strict rules in any of them. The small Gobi ponies, with their disproportionately large heads, are allowed to race against the slender thoroughbreds of the steppe, and sometimes the jockeys are boys or girls of ten or twelve years. Moreover, these young riders often manage to win against the older and infinitely more experienced riders.

When the various races, wrestling matches and other exhibitions are over for the day, the crowds sing and dance to the accompaniment of gay music provided by bands paid by the Government. The importance attached to the *Nadan* may be gauged from the fact that an official five days' bank holiday is observed for the purpose.

TO the European mentality it may seem curious that the Mongolian Government, while depriving the lamas of the suffrage, should support religious festivals with subsidies. But the contradiction is only apparent. The Mongolian Government is, after all, composed of Orientals, and Orientals love mysticism, quite independently from any other consideration. But mysticism and statesmanship are two different things, and the leading Mongolian politicians could not help, with the realistic side of their mind, realising that the lamas have done considerable harm to the country through the temporal power of the *Bogdos*. They have remedied the situation by forcing the lamas to confine themselves to their own legitimate sphere and keep out of politics; but that does not prevent them from making regular pilgrimages to the monasteries and crawling round them on their stomachs for the salvation of their souls.

Lamaism as it exists to-day, with its strictly defined hierarchy and its external pomp, was created some centuries after Buddha by Tson-Kava, and though based on the few simple moral teachings of the Buddha, it cannot justly be described as Buddhism. Lamaism is extremely flexible and its rapid spread

was due to its tolerance towards other religions.

The Buddha in his numerous speeches never commanded his followers to pray to a higher being, or to accompany such acts with a brilliant ritual. It was only centuries after the Buddha's death that the foundations of lamaism were laid by the teaching that the saints live in the centre of a great void and contact with or access to them is only possible through the lamas. Then came Tson-Kava and completed the degradation of the Buddha's pure principles by establishing a number of dogmas, the most important of which are as follows: The highest being is the Addibuddha, who has created Dian Buddhas, or spirits living in perpetual bliss in heaven. These spirits appear on earth in human incarnations, of which up till now there have been four: Garga Sadi, Gang Mani, Gag Nib, and Sakia Muni (the Buddha himself). Maideri is to appear after some thousands of years, in order to abolish the old laws and proclaim the new. At the end of the world the last Dian Buddha—Ku-Sa-Kroy—will appear on earth. According to the teachings of Tson-Kava, also known as "yellow lamaism," any person can attain to sainthood either by his acts or by the circumstances of his birth (like the Grand Lamas).

The lamaist temples accordingly contain thousands of pictures representing such saints.

Tson-Kava's teachings concerning the origin of man are rather interesting. According to him mankind is descended from the righteous denizens of the Sun-Bet Mountain. However, man has lost his right to

happiness on earth by indulging in sin under the influence of the three unclean elements, which are allegorically represented by a pig (signifying filth), a serpent (cunning), and a goat or hen (sexual licence). Absolution can only be obtained by constant meditation and by righteous acts which would lead to the righteous person's reincarnation as a holy lama. This teaching is briefly expressed in the sentence, "Become a lama, so you will reach Nirvana sooner."

The lamas in the monasteries have a strictly defined hierarchy. The novice first becomes an *ubasi*, then a *ghecul*, then, successively, a *bandji* and a *gelyud*. If he is very talented or very fortunate, he may eventually attain to the high rank of *gebji*, but this rank is only conferred on lamas who, in addition to a thorough knowledge of lamaism, have also distinguished themselves in other ways. The dogmas of "yellow lamaism" are contained in a book called *Yum*, while a detailed explanation of them is given in the *Gan-Jur-Dan-Jur*, a work running into many volumes. The teachings of Tson-Kava received a powerful impulse through the activities of Kubilei Khan, who during his reign imposed them on the whole of Mongolia and China, ordering the destruction of all the books of the previous sects.

Lama students are sent to a monastery in early childhood and must study and work for years before they are admitted to the priesthood. Ordination takes place in the monastery temple, in the presence of the assembled lamas. The young men to be ordained are lined up before the older lamas, who

fire questions at them in order to test their knowledge. After this the head of the monastery turns to the lamas with the question:

“Holy brethren, do you think this young man, . . . by name, worthy to be ordained?”

If the reply is favourable, the youth concerned is sent into a corner reserved for those who have passed the test; if not, he may apply for ordination at a later date.

The successful candidates are ordained together. The head priest of the monastery recites the vows, which the young men repeat after him in chorus:

“I vow that I shall not kill a living being of any kind;

I vow that I shall not appropriate anything that does not belong to me;

I vow that I shall refrain from all excess;

I vow that I shall never lie, nor cheat;

I vow that I shall never partake of intoxicating liquor;

I vow that I shall never take food at forbidden times;

I vow that I shall never dance or sing for pleasure and will refrain from listening to non-religious music and from acting;

I vow that I shall never use perfumes, ointments or wear jewellery;

I vow that I shall never sleep in a high or wide bed;

I vow that I shall never store gold or silver wherever I live.”

The young lamas' recitation sounds like the humming of myriads of bees in the awesome dusk of the temple. Facing them sits the gilt statue of the Buddha, with a patient smile on his face, as though offering forgiveness to the young lamas for any future infringement of their vows.

After the vows the prayer-mills are set clattering in the hands of the older lamas, the din of the mills merging with the monotonous sound of the lamas' magic formula, "*Om mani padme hum*," which is recited at an increasingly rapid rate, until only the word "*om*" is heard again and again. Then the lama bearing the highest rank in the monastery rises to his feet and recites in a loud voice:

"With Buddha I seek refuge,
With justice I seek refuge,
In the monastery I seek refuge."

The chorus of newly ordained priests repeats the text after him. Then the "reader" again:

"To avoid excess,
To do good,
To keep the soul pure—
That is the law of Buddha."

Then comes the blare of trumpets, the crash of enormous cymbals and the lamas ascend to the roof terrace, where, from the eastern chamber of the "holy of holies," the swords, masks and other requisites used for exorcism are brought out. The monastery's "prophet" dons the gold-shot robe of his craft,

places the mask on his head, and starts his leaping, twisting, writhing dance. Then, when he has worked himself into a trance-like ecstasy and collapses on the terrace, the newly fledged lamas go up to him, one after another, and he tells them, in an unearthly voice, what their future is going to be. The young lamas do not understand the prophet's broken, guttural words, and the prophecy has to be interpreted to them by the chief lama of the monastery.

After ordination the fate of the young lamas is entirely in the hands of the Lama Church, which alone can confer on them the coveted rank of *ghebj*, which would enable them to reach Nirvana by becoming saints immediately after their death, without any further reincarnations.

On the other hand, a lama may leave the monastery at any time and engage in any civil occupation he chooses, though he is never absolved from his vows and must remain a celibate. Later, if he so desires, he can return to the monastery, but not necessarily to the one which he has left; any other monastery will gladly accept him. The vow of celibacy is only cancelled when a lama is the only surviving male member of his family.

At the time of ordination great care is taken that young men who have some obligation to the State should not be accepted into the priesthood and thus escape the obligation. For instance, according to the present laws all Mongolians between the ages of eighteen and sixty are liable to military service, and men between these ages are not ordained at the

monasteries unless they have been granted official exemption from military service. The Buddhist nunneries, on the other hand, only admit women over the age of fifty years, because there is a heavy surplus of men in Mongolia and it is not desired that women who are still capable of motherhood should be shut off from the world.

THE MONASTERIES

DURING my long stay at Urga I had ample occasion to visit the monasteries, of which there are several in the Mongolian capital; that was why Urga was formerly called *Bogdo Chure*, or Holy Monastery. The most important of the monasteries, which are really separate towns, is the Ganden, the theological college of "yellow lamaism." Next come the Choizi Lama Chure, Dzun Chure, Breven Chit and Silba monasteries, not to mention a number of others which are dotted along the Tola River.

The Ganden is a vast monastery city situated on a mountain to the west of Urga, with a gilt-roofed temple of mighty dimensions that seems to be looking down on the capital with the aloof dignity of a golden idol. The temple's treasures include the ninety-foot statue of Maideri, the Messiah to come, resting on a colossal lotus flower. The statue is gilt all over, but the people believe that it is of solid gold and that the lamas only gave out that it was gold-plated for fear of a foreign tribe invading the country for the sake of the fabulous value of the statue. It was in this temple that the last *Bogdo Gegen* and his wife were crowned, and it was at this monastery that the Dalai Lama was

entertained when he fled to Urga for fear of an attack by the British.

The monastery has many streets of tents and small houses and always presents an animated scene, with red- or yellow-robed lamas constantly passing to and fro in pursuit of their daily duties.

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The Choizi Lama Chure is noted for the fact that the gilt body of the last *Bogdo Gegen* is enthroned in its temple. The *Bogdo* sits in a glass cabinet decorated with gold mouldings, with his eyes open and a fixed smile on his face. In front of the cabinet there are valuable religious objects and censers, in which incense is burned day and night.

The Choizi Lama Chure also contains Mongolia's most beautiful objects of art. Its southern wall is inlaid with thousands of coloured tiles, while the other walls are built in brick and wood blocks covered with pure gold and decorated with tens of thousands of pictures and enamelled designs. The lower part of the roof frame bears countless beautiful statuettes made in pure gold. In front of the entrance stand two screens decorated with wonderful friezes representing mythological scenes.

A little further away from the entrance lies the "sick man's stone," a large slab of stone with prayer-mills on one side and praying boards on the other. When a believer's life was despaired of, he was brought to the monastery, laid on this stone and covered with a sheet. While the sick man was fighting for his life

the prayer-mills were kept going by the wind and the lamas knelt on the praying boards and prayed. Meanwhile, the "official" dogs also gathered round, sniffing. . . . If the sick man showed signs of recovery he was taken back to his home; if he died on the "sick man's stone," the dogs immediately fell upon him and tore him to pieces.

The National Government, immediately upon its coming into power, forbade this type of "medical treatment," and to-day the "sick man's stone" is only a relic of the past.

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The Silba Monastery has already been mentioned in an earlier chapter, but the Breven Chit deserves a separate paragraph here. This monastery lies on the southern slope of the Holy Mountain and is not visible from Urga. It is here that the lamas of the highest rank, who are said to be initiated into the "secret sciences," have their being, and it is here, too, that Djenghis Khan's sword and saddle have been kept for eight centuries.

The monastery that maintains the closest contact with the people is Dzun Chure, which houses the lama scientists, doctors, painters, metal-workers and other artisans. It has the largest number of prayer-mills round its fences, and passers-by may take shelter from the rain, as well as pray, under the pointed little roofs that protect the mills. Also the Cam Festival at Dzun Chure is more brilliant and entertaining than at other monasteries, and the people are allowed,

without special permission, to pass in and out of its gates and stroll between the lamas' tents at will. More important still, Dzun Chure has the best "exorcisers" and "prophets." For all these reasons the people prefer to go to Dzun Chure, where they are made to feel "at home," not only for their devotions but also for medical treatment and prophecies.

It was at Dzun Chure that the sale of the last *Bogdo Gegen's* effects took place. The Grand Lama left numerous travelling bags, knives, watches and clocks, gala shoes and other similar things. A Mongolian auction sale is carried on without an auctioneer. The "lots" are exhibited, and beside each there is a tablet and a piece of chalk. Intending buyers write a bid on this tablet and sign their names. Another buyer may make a higher bid in the same manner, but if no higher bid is forthcoming for a certain time, then the original bidder is awarded the "lot" concerned. He may have to wait weeks or months before he is informed of this, but, on the other hand, if he is tired of waiting he is entitled to send a message to the manager of the sale withdrawing his bid.

At the sale in question I bought an Austrian-made travelling bag, a fire-lighter and an enormous table-knife used by one of the Grand Lama's body-guards, an eight-foot giant.

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The monastery in which the *Bogdos* lived is held in great reverence by the people. It lies on the bank of the Tola River and the palaces which it comprises

look like the embodiments of some fairy tale. The late *Bogdo* mostly lived in the Winter Palace, or in a smaller, ground level building situated close by, on the bank of a brook, or in the Summer Palace. He rarely stayed in his official residence, which was occupied by the lamas of his court and in whose temple the divine services on the most important religious festivals were held. On such occasions the Grand Lama sat enthroned in the temple, blessing the congregation, not with spoken words or by raising his hands but with the aid of a long cord. One end of the cord was held by the Grand Lama, while the other end, which was in most cases outside the temple, was touched in turn by members of the congregation, it being presumed that the cord carried their prayers to the holy man and his blessing back to them. The faithful at these services always brought gifts to the *Bogdo*—horses, camels, and the like—which were accepted and duly registered by the *Bogdo's* treasurer. In return they received, in addition to the inevitable blessing, a consecrated *chadak* or, if they were poor, a gift of money. The sick among them were also given appropriate medicines.

The last *Bogdo's* favourite residence was the small building in the grounds of the Winter Palace, a perfect gem of Chinese architecture. Built entirely in wood, it is, both inside and outside, profusely decorated with wonderful wood carvings and wainscoting and furnished with priceless carved and gilt furniture.

The Winter Palace itself is a one-storey building with eight large rooms on each floor. Its gate is

thickly plated with gold, and even the lion's head through which the chain-ring passes is of pure gold. The precious metal of the gate alone is estimated to be worth £200,000,000. The Palace is furnished with true Eastern opulence, but there is nothing of the East about its central heating system, its private electrical generating plant, which was installed long before the people of Urga had heard about electricity. When it was decided to convert the Palace into a public museum the work was entrusted to me, and so I had ample opportunity to explore the building. In one room all the walls were covered with long mirrors, all of which, I discovered, turned on hinges. On looking behind the mirrors I was amazed to find that the walls proper were covered with finely executed drawings of a most grossly obscene character! Another large room contained a magnificent collection of some thousands of clocks and watches. Finely wrought Eastern time-pieces lay side by side with European clocks and watches of all periods, including the cheapest German watches. The last *Bogdo* was also a keen collector of—motor-cars. It is quite safe to say that he never rode in one, yet the vast garage in the Palace grounds contained all types of cars, from the most ancient and primitive makes to the most modern and expensive types.

The Winter Palace is now a museum and the exhibits, in addition to the Grand Lama's treasures, include objects of which any European museum might be proud. For a negligible entrance fee the public may now see the late *Bogdo's* marvellous porcelain

collection, his pictures, statues and other masterpieces, as well as weapons from the time of Djenghis Khan and some of the contents of the old Hun tombs excavated by the Kozlov Expedition. The Grand Lama's archives, which comprise the records kept by the High Priests for centuries, are kept in excellent order for investigation by scholars. In the Natural History section the Urga Museum possesses a number of petrified dinosaur eggs and the skeletons of prehistoric animals. American collectors have offered £1,000 apiece for these eggs, but, naturally, they are not for sale. The late *Bogdo's* bedroom has been left untouched, and his beautifully carved canopied bed, with its heavy silk curtains, pillows and eiderdowns, still looks as if it had been slept in only the night before.

The Summer Palace is now the headquarters of the National Party, and also houses the High School of Political Science. It was, even in the *Bogdo's* time, furnished on a far more modest scale than the Winter Palace. Extensive reconstruction has considerably changed the external aspect of this palace, but the enormous twenty-foot pendulum that was installed by the late *Bogdo* in the grounds is still there, like the mighty clockwork with which the pendulum is connected in one of the rooms. This curious example of the clock-maker's art was made on the Grand Lama's instructions by a Buriat named Badma, who was, all in one, court photographer, mechanic, musical instrument-maker, clock-maker and even dentist to Mongolia's ruler. In the *Bogdo's* lifetime Badma lived in a small house in the grounds of the

Summer Palace, and he lives there still, the National Government having made him a gift of his home.

Old Badma is a "character," who likes to talk to his many visitors about his late master, who, though he was the supreme religious and temporal head of all Mongolia, always found time for his hobbies.

XLII

I LEAVE MONGOLIA

FOR many months after my arrival in Mongolia I thought of nothing but my return to Hungary, and my spirits revived or drooped according to the turn of events which determined my chances of continuing the journey to my native country. Then, for years and years, marriage, absorption in my work as an architect and joint manager of the Urga power works, as well as my love of Mongolia and its people, caused me to forget my home-sickness, and even when financial considerations ceased to count it never occurred to me to pay at least a brief visit to Hungary. But apparently the psychological state that is called home-sickness was always there in my subconscious mind, and in the summer of 1929, after a nine years' stay in Mongolia, I was seized with a fierce longing for my native land which I could not and would not repress.

Accordingly, after many talks with my wife, I applied to the Government for release from my contract and a passport. Had I been an ordinary Mongolian citizen, or a foreigner without connection with the State, I should have had to go to the police and prove my "political trustworthiness" before being allowed to leave the capital. I should also have had to

produce evidence that I had paid my taxes and was not in debt to anyone. As an employee of the Government my task was at once easier and more difficult, because while I had free access to any high official, the Government did not want to lose my services.

However, after a great deal of parleying I was granted a passport for myself, my wife and my little daughter. The next step was to hire a vehicle to take us across the Gobi Desert to Kalgan. This was not an easy matter, as car owners who were prepared to undertake the journey were scarce, and it was considered very "selfish" on the part of any individual or family to monopolise an entire vehicle. In the end I came to an agreement with a "cabby" who owned a four-seater, and was to transport to Kalgan, in addition to myself and my family, his own wife, the Chinese bookkeeper of an English firm with his wife and three children, a Russian trader and three Jewish traders. We all had a great deal of luggage, including tents, cooking utensils, provisions and bedding, without which it would have been impossible to travel in the desert. At first it seemed utterly impossible to me to accommodate 15 persons and a mountain of luggage on a vehicle with only four seats, but the Mongolian "cabby" showed me that it can be done. First he filled the body of the car with the trunks and suitcases that would not be required during the journey; then, with the aid of ropes, he topped this with a wide platform composed of other luggage, fixing the articles of frequent use in accessible positions. The work took many hours and was carried out in the presence of a

large crowd which collected to watch the proceedings, shouting advice or lending a hand to the "cabby" when required, and indulging in good-natured chaff when he made a mistake. When the car was finally ready to start we placed the women and children in the centre of the platform, while we men sat on the edges, with our legs hanging down. To prevent accidents we tied ourselves to the luggage with ropes.

Amid the cheers and good wishes of the crowd the car started off for the customs enclosure, which is situated in an angle at the confluence of the Silba and the Tola rivers and consists of a large number of tents. In my case the customs examination was waived, but ordinarily travellers are detained here for many hours while their luggage is ruthlessly unloaded and examined bit by bit. There is hardly anything that cannot be freely imported into Mongolia, but there are a number of things that must not be exported, including maps, photographs or anything that might conceivably prove useful to a potential enemy, and the traveller who is careless enough to carry documents not previously censored and marked by the police, must wait until they are read through by the customs. Once the customs mark has been applied to the luggage the traveller is not held up at other customs offices on the way, unless the customs have reason to suspect him. On the other hand, sometimes the Urga customs enclosure is packed with loaded cars for days and even weeks when the weather suddenly changes and desert travel becomes dangerous.

We left the customs enclosure with sixteen

passengers instead of the original fifteen, the sixteenth being a customs official who was to accompany us to the next customs office outside the city, in order to save us from possible complications. As our overloaded car thundered through the streets of the Russian quarter I thought of the many dangers towards which we were heading. The road to China across the desert has many perils and many a caravan has perished in the terrible sea of sand. But I had one comfort—that this route was at least free from bandits, unlike the road to Tibet, which is infested with robber bands who think nothing of slaughtering a whole caravan.

The second customs office was less than a hundred yards from the last house of the city. The officials were already waiting for us in the road, having been informed of our arrival in advance. Here the formalities only consisted in checking the number and identity of the passengers and examining the driver's permit. This done, the customs officials treated us to cigarettes and tea, after which we said good-bye to the customs official who had accompanied us from Urga and set off. In a few minutes we were in the valley of the Tola, a grass-covered narrow plain that is as flat as a billiard table.

Some six miles from Urga we saw on the hilltops flanking the river the ruins of the old Chinese military barracks, now only heaps of crumbling clay, decaying relics of the long period of Chinese rule. On the opposite bank of the river spread the Government's enormous new timber yard, from which Mongolian

lumbermen were floating logs down the Tola towards Urga.

Soon the valley tapered to a narrow strip and we reached the solitary bridge that spans the Tola for many miles, a wooden structure that looked too frail to bear our overloaded car. However, we crossed it without mishap and drove on along by the telegraph line, the only safe guide we had after this. It was now two o'clock in the afternoon, and most of the passengers were already asleep from the combined effects of the heat and the vibration of the "travelling platform," while others were wondering aloud when we were going to reach our first halting-place. Three hours later we reached the foot of the Gurbun Talagoi ("Three Heads") Mountain and pitched our tents. We were still in inhabited country, with a few tents here and there and flocks of sheep grazing in the distance.

Having cooked and eaten our supper we turned in for the night, as we had to resume our journey at dawn the next day and we were all in need of rest.

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Next day we travelled over hilly country, encountering many tents and flocks on the rich pasture land. Gradually, as the morning advanced, we began to experience a peculiar sensation of discomfort which none of us passengers was able to explain. It was only when the driver reminded us that we were travelling 6,000 feet above sea-level that we understood the nature of our complaint—accelerated breathing—and were less worried about it. Later we came to the

Chorin cliffs, which project from a mighty wall of rock hundreds of yards above the road, so that while passing beneath them we had an awful sensation that they were about to crash down on our heads. The cliffs are natural statues of crouching men and various animals, carved by the fierce winds of the Gobi Desert, and according to a popular superstition they are the petrified images of damned souls. Through a crack in the rock wall we had a brief glimpse of the golden roofs and red-and-white buildings of the Chorin Monastery; then the car thundered on, coughing and spluttering, towards a higher summit from which we could already see the endless desert. But before we reached the desert we had to cross a pass formed by terrible black rocks which seemed to blot out the brilliant light of the blazing sun.

Soon after that we came to a telegraph station. The telegraph clerk was a Russian and the man in charge of the station a Mongolian, and they both received us with great friendliness, mainly, I suspected, because they knew that we carried tinned foods, alcoholic drinks and other similar treasures. Such things were unobtainable in Chorin, as the inhabitants of the monastery lived on a very different diet. After the first few drinks the telegraph clerk became sentimental and invited us to stay at the station, offering us his own rooms, but we thanked him and drove on. We were anxious to reach the Sein-Ussu ("Sweet Water") well, the only source of drinking water between Chorin and that distant part of the desert. The section of the Gobi Desert beginning at Sein-Ussu

provides an indescribably beautiful sight. For a forty-mile-long stretch the ground is covered with pebbles in a dazzling variety of colours. We drove over a carpet of yellow chalcedon, blood-red and white carnelian, jasper, quartzes of various colours and red granite, and all around us, as far as our eyes could see, the sun was reflected from a billion sparkling gems.

The natives dare not collect these pretty stones on account of the origin attributed to them by legend. This legend has it that, once upon a time, there was a holy hermit living alone in a cave not far from the Sein-Ussu well, which he used to visit each week in order to refill his gourd with water. At such times the birds and wild animals of the desert used to gather round him and he used to talk to them. Pilgrims came to him by the hundred from distant regions, and the holy hermit never sent them away without a word of comfort or advice. Then one day as he bent over the well to dip his gourd, his soul suddenly departed and he fell into the water. The animals that were present lifted him out and carried him back to his cave, and as they went along with their holy burden a precious carpet of pretty-coloured stones was spread before them. The legend is still believed by the people, and it is thought that anyone taking away these coloured stones will be dogged by misfortune all his life.

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Night was falling as we reached the well and, to our great good fortune, we found a number of cattle-

men encamped near Sein-Ussu, a place that is only used as a camp site in transit. One Mongolian invited our party for supper, and his wife cooked a whole lamb in our honour. She put the meat into a copper of water over the *tagan* and took the copper off as soon as the water came to the boil, using neither salt nor any other seasoning in the process of cooking. When the women of the party curiously inquired the reason, the Mongolian lady replied with decision that that was the only way to cook lamb. The meat was served in the copper, each of us chopping off a chunk with our own knives. After the meat we were given tea—with plenty of salt. This method of “sweetening” tea was not new to me, and I congratulated ourselves that our hostess did not use Epsom salt, which some Mongolians—for some unfathomable reason—always take with their tea.

After supper we asked our hostess whether we might pay her something for the princely meal. She replied that the meal was a gift, but if we wanted to make her a gift she would accept it. We offered her what we thought was a fair equivalent, but the good lady refused to accept more than two *tugriks* (about 3s. 6d.) for feeding our party of fifteen persons.

Before turning in for the night we examined the car by the light of a lantern, so that we might continue our journey in the morning without fear of trouble.

The next day was perhaps our most critical day, for we were travelling across the most dangerous part of the desert, which is visited by terrific blizzards in winter and scorching sandstorms in summer. At

one point we passed an almost perfect square formed on the ground by the bones of camels. Within the square were tattered remnants of tents and rusty cooking utensils. We knew the story of that gruesome geometrical design. The previous spring a big camel caravan started from Kalgan for Urga. When they were in the heart of the desert the weather unexpectedly turned and the caravan suddenly found itself in a terrific blizzard. The travellers formed the camels into a square, made a protective outer square with all the goods and luggage they were carrying, and built several tents in the centre. A few days after they were believed to have reached this spot the caravan was discovered under the snow; both men and camels had been frozen to death. The human remains were taken back to China, but the square of dead camels was left to decay in the desert.

In this region the Gobi Desert is entirely barren but for a few tamarisk bushes which somehow manage to eke out a stunted existence. However, it is quite clear that in a former geological age the Gobi must have been a fertile land with rich vegetation, for every now and then we came across petrified tree-trunks in which the rings were still discernible.

The exit from the desert led through a terrible canyon that somehow made me feel as though I were temporarily buried alive. The bottom of the canyon was so narrow that there was barely room for the car to pass, the rock walls on both sides rising sheer, so that only a narrow strip of sky was visible. Here, too, many a caravan has met with disaster, when

a sudden cloudburst filled the canyon and swept men and animals that happened to be there to their deaths.

Nor did we escape trouble. At one point the front of the car suddenly sunk into the loose sand and one of the rear wheels shot up into the air, rotating there for a moment. Then, with an ear-splitting crash the rear axle snapped in two. It took us many weary hours to repair the damage, but in the end we accomplished it and drove on.

We were now nearing the Mongolian border and soon we were in Ude, which is the last Mongolian station along the Copenhagen-Pekin telegraph line. After a brief rest at the telegraph station in Ude we drove to the customs office, where, my former position in Urga notwithstanding, our luggage was thoroughly examined, in case we had collected some prohibited article since leaving Urga. The search took several hours and as we also had to visit the police station to have our "political trustworthiness" confirmed, we were obliged to spend that night at Ude.

We resumed our journey in the morning, always driving along by the telegraph line. Once more there was a sea of sand everywhere around us. Suddenly I saw in the distance a Mongolian soldier appearing from nowhere and galloping towards us with his rifle raised in his right arm. When he reached us he called on the driver to stop. We had to show him our passports and, fortunately, he looked at mine first. Gazing at it attentively for a few moments he said:

"*Ta albachum beina?*" (You're an official under the Treasury?)

"*Timbe*" (yes), I said.

The Mongolian courteously saluted, wished me a pleasant journey and rode away without looking at any of the other passports.

A few miles farther on our way was barred by two soldiers, and once again I had to show my passport. These soldiers belonged to the frontier guard maintained by the Government near Ude, not in barracks or official buildings that might be seen from the road, but as a sort of guerrilla force that lay hidden behind rocks and in gorges, so that they could swoop down suddenly on passing travellers. We were held up a number of times during the next hour or so, but each time my special passport was sufficient to reassure the soldiers.

Soon after the last "hold-up" we saw ahead of us a few stone heaps and a wooden arch with a Chinese roof and carved pillars. The arch was hung with coloured *chadaks* and horses' tails. We had reached the Chinese frontier.

Here there were no frontier guards and no customs. We were not asked who we were, where we were going or what we were carrying in our luggage. We could go where we liked, so long as we had sufficient money to pay for what we consumed. We drove through a number of villages—Orlean, Panzianu, Chapsin, Miotan—without much trouble. At Chapsin we met the Andrews Expedition, which was then working in that region. It was at Chapsin,

too, that we encountered the only slight difficulty before reaching Kalgan.

The streets of the village bore unwelcome signs of recent heavy rains, and at one point the mud was so deep that our driver dared not proceed. The only way to get over the morass with the heavy vehicle was to cover the dangerous stretch with straw and twigs, and we accordingly agreed with a Chinaman living nearby to carry out the work on payment of five dollars. While he worked the inevitable crowd gathered round. When the last twig was laid I paid the Chinaman, and as I was doing so a woman—presumably the Chinaman's wife—came up to him and asked a question, to which he replied at length, betraying by his tone and manner that he was a badly hen-pecked husband. The woman then suddenly turned to the driver, saying that five dollars was too little for all that "treasure," and that she wanted fifteen. The driver took no notice of her and started the car. But he applied the brakes immediately with alarm writ large on his face, for the woman had thrown herself in front of the wheels. Of course, the determined lady won, for the driver could not very well try conclusions with her in the presence of so many of her countrymen, so he paid her another ten dollars and promptly collected the amount from his passengers. Then he drove on, and looking back we could see the hen-pecked Chinaman picking up the muddy straw and twigs which had just earned him fifteen dollars.

THE NEW MONGOLIA

The following day my family and I left Kalgan by the Chinese Express for Tientsin, where we embarked for the sixty days' voyage for Naples.

And from Naples we travelled to my native land, or to that part of it which the Treaty of Trianon has left of it.

THE END

